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WOOD AND STONE

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WOOD AND STONE

A ROMANCE

BY

JOHN COWPER POWYS

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Parcere personis, dicere de vitiis.

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DEDICATED

WITH DEVOTED ADMIRATION
TO THE GREATEST POET AND NOVELIST
OF OUR AGE

THOMAS HARDY

PREFACE

THE following narrative gathers itself round what is, perhaps, one of the most absorbing and difficult problems of our age; the problem namely of getting to the bottom of that world-old struggle between the "well-constituted" and the "ill-constituted," which the writings of Nietzsche have recently called so startlingly to our attention.

Is there such a thing at all as Nietzsche's born and trained aristocracy? In other words, is the secret of the universe to be reached only along the lines of Power, Courage, and Pride? Or, — on the contrary, — is the hidden and basic law of things, not Power but Sacrifice, not Pride but Love?

Granting, for the moment, that this latter alternative is the true one, what becomes of the drastic distinction between "well-constituted" and "ill-constituted"?

In a universe whose secret is not self-assertion, but self-abandonment, might not the "well-constituted" be regarded as the vanquished, and the "ill-constituted" as the victors? In other words, who, in such a universe, *are* the "well-constituted"?

But the difficulty does not end here. Supposing we rule out of our calculation both of these antipodal possibilities, — both the universe whose inner fatality is the striving towards Power, and the universe whose inner fatality is the striving towards Love, — will

there not be found to remain two other rational hypotheses, either, namely, that there is no inner fatality about it at all, that the whole thing is a blind, fantastic, chance-drifting chaos; or that the true secret lies in some subtle and difficult reconciliation, between the will to Power and the will to Love?

The present chronicle is an attempt to give an answer, inevitably a very tentative one, to this formidable question; the writer, feeling that, as in all these matters, where the elusiveness of human nature plays so prominent a part, there is more hope of approaching the truth, indirectly, and by means of the imaginative mirror of art, than directly, and by means of rational theorizing.

The whole question is indeed so intimately associated with the actual panorama of life and the evasive caprices of flesh and blood, that every kind of drastic and clinching formula breaks down under its pressure.

Art, alone, — that mysterious daughter of Life, — has the secret of following the incalculable movements of the Force to which she is so near akin. A story which grossly points its moral with fixed indicative finger is a story which, in the very strain of that premature articulation, has lost the magic of its probability. The secret of our days flies from our attempts at making it fit such clumsy categories, and the maddening flavour of the cosmic cup refuses to be imprisoned in any laboratory.

At this particular moment in the history of our planet it is above all important to protest against this prostituting of art to pseudo-science. It must

not be allowed to these hasty philosophical conclusions and spasmodic ethical systems, to block up and close in, as they are so ready to do, the large free horizons of humour and poetry. The magic of the world, mocking both our gravity and our flippancy, withdraws itself from our shrewd rationalizations, only to take refuge all the deeper in our intrinsic and evasive hearts.

In this story the author has been led to interest himself in the curious labyrinthine subtleties which mark the difference, — a difference to be observed in actual life, quite apart from moral values, — between the type of person who might be regarded as born to rule, and the type of person who might be regarded as born to be ruled over. The grand Nietzschean distinction is, in a sense, rejected here upon its own ground, a ground often inconsequently deserted by those who make it their business to condemn it. Such persons are apt to forget that the whole assumption of this distinction lies in a substitution of *æsthetic* values, for the values more commonly applied.

The pivotal point of the ensuing narrative might be described as an attempt to suggest, granting such an æsthetic test, that the hearts of "ill-constituted" persons, — the hearts of slaves, Pariahs, cowards, outcasts, and other victims of fate, — may be at least as *interesting*, in their bizarre convolutions, as the hearts of the bravest and gayest among us. And *interest*, after all, is the supreme exigency of the æsthetic sense!

In order to thrust back from its free horizons these invasions of its prerogatives by alien powers, Art

must prove itself able to evoke the very tang and salt and bitter-sweetness of the actual pell-mell of life — its unfolding spaces, its shell-strewn depths. She must defend herself from those insidious traitors in her own camp who would betray her into the hands of the system-makers, by proving that she can approach nearer to the magic of the world, without a system, than all these are able to do, with all of theirs! She must keep the horizons open — that must be her main concern. She must hold fast to poetry and humour, and about her creations there must be a certain spirit of *liberation*, and the presence of large tolerant after-thoughts.

The curious thing about so many modern writers is, that in their earnest preoccupation with philosophical and social problems, they grow strained and thin and sententious, losing the mass and volume, as well as the elusive-blown airs, of the flowing tide. On the other hand there is an irritating tendency, among some of the cleverest, to recover their lost balance after these dogmatic speculations, by foolish indulgence in sheer burlesque — burlesque which is the antithesis of all true humour.

Heaven help us! It is easy enough to criticize the lath and plaster which, in so many books, take the place of flesh and blood. It is less easy to catch, for oneself, the breath of the ineffable spirit.

Perhaps the deplorable thinness and sententiousness, to which reference has been made, may be due to the fact that in the excitement of modern controversy, our enterprising writers have no time to read. It is a strange thing, but one really feels as though, among all modern English authors, the only one who

brings with him an atmosphere of the large mellow leisurely humanists of the past, — of the true classics, — is Mr. Thomas Hardy.

It is for this reason, for the reason that with this great genius, life is approached in the old ample ironic way, that the narrator of the following tale has taken the liberty of putting Mr. Hardy's name upon his title-page. In any case mere courtesy and decency called for such a recognition. One could hardly have the audacity to plant one's poor standard in the heart of Wessex without obeisance being paid to the literary over-lord of that suggestive region.

It must be understood, however, that the temerity of the author does not carry him so far as to regard his eccentric story as in any sense an attempted imitation of the Wessex novelist. Mr. Hardy cannot be imitated. The mention of his admirable name at the beginning of this book is no more than a humble salutation addressed to the monarch of that particular country, by a wayward nomad, lighting a bivouac-fire, for a brief moment, in the heart of a land that is not his.

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WOOD AND STONE

CHAPTER I

LEO'S HILL

MIDWAY between Glastonbury and Bridport, at the point where the eastern plains of Somersetshire merge into the western valleys of Dorsetshire, stands a prominent and noticeable hill; a hill resembling the figure of a crouching lion.

East of the hill, nestling at the base of a cone-shaped eminence overgrown with trees and topped by a thin Thyrsus-like tower, lies the village of Nevilton.

Were it not for the neighbourhood of the more massive promontory this conical protuberance would itself have stood out as an emphatic landmark; but Leo's Hill detracts from its emphasis, as it detracts from the emphasis of all other deviations from the sea-level, between Yeoborough and the foot of the Quantocks.

It was on the apex of Nevilton Mount that the Holy Rood of Waltham was first found; but with whatever spiritual influence this event may have endowed the gentler summit, it is not to it, but to Leo's Hill, that the lives and destinies of the people of Nevilton have come to gravitate. One might

indeed without difficulty conceive of a strange supernatural conflict going on between the consecrated repository of Christian tradition guarding its little flock, and the impious heathen fortress to which day by day that flock is driven, to seek their material sustenance.

Even in Pre-Celtic times those formidably dug trenches and frowning slopes must have looked down on the surrounding valley; and to this day it is the same suggestion of tyrannical military dominance, which, in spite of quarries and cranes and fragrant yellow gorse, gives the place its prevailing character.

The rounded escarpments have for centuries been covered with pleasant turf and browsed upon by sheep; but patient antiquarian research constantly brings to light its coins, torques, urns, arrow-heads, amulets; and rumour hints that yet more precious things lie concealed under those grassy mounds.

The aboriginal tribes have been succeeded by the Celt; the Celt by the Roman; the Roman by the Saxon; without any change in the place's inherent character, and without any lessening of its tyranny over the surrounding country. For though Leo's Hill dominates no longer by means of its external strength, it dominates, quite as completely, by means of its interior riches.

It is, in fact, a huge rock-island, washed by the leafy waves of the encircling valleys, and containing, as its hid treasure, stone enough to rebuild Babylon.

In that particular corner of the West Country, so distinct and deep-rooted are the legendary survivals, it is hard not to feel as though some vast

spiritual conflict were still proceeding between the two opposed Mythologies — the one drawing its strength from the impulse to Power, and the other from the impulse to Sacrifice.

A village-dweller in Nevilton might, if he were philosophically disposed, be just as much a percipient of this cosmic struggle, as if he stood between the Palatine and St. Peter's.

Let him linger among the cranes and pulleys of this heathen promontory, and look westward to the shrine of the Holy Grail, or eastward to where rested the Holy Rood, and it would be strange if he did not become conscious of the presence of eternal spiritual antagonists, wrestling for the mastery.

He would at any rate be made aware of the fatal force of Inanimate Objects over human destiny.

There would seem to him something positively monstrous and sinister about the manner in which this brute mass of inert sandstone had possessed itself of the lives of the generations. It had come to this at last; that those who owned the Hill owned the dwellers beneath the Hill; and the Hill itself owned them that owned it.

The name by which the thing had come to be known indicated sufficiently well its nature.

Like a couchant desert-lion it overlooked its prey; and would continue to do so, as long as the planet lasted.

Out of its inexhaustible bowels the tawny monster fed the cities of seven countries — cities whose halls, churches, theatres, and markets, mocked the caprices of rain and sun as obdurately as their earth-bound parent herself.

The sandstone of Leo's Hill remains, so architects tell us, the only rival of granite, as a means for the perpetuation of human monuments. Even granite wears less well than this, in respect to the assaults of rain and flood. The solitary mysterious monoliths of Stonehenge, with their unknown, alien origin, alone seem to surpass it in their eternal perdurance.

As far as Nevilton itself is concerned everything in the place owes its persuasive texture to this resistant yet soft material. From the lordly Elizabethan mansion to the humblest pig-stye, they all proceed from the entrails of Leo's Hill; and they all still wear — these motley whelps of the great dumb beast — its tawny skin, its malleable sturdiness, its enduring consistence.

Who can resist a momentary wonder at the strange mutability of the fate that governs these things? The actual slabs, for example, out of which the high shafts and slender pinnacles of the church-tower were originally hewn, must once have lain in littered heaps for children to scramble upon, and dogs to rub against. And now they are the windy resting-places, and airy "coigns of vantage," of all the feathered tribes in their migrations!

What especially separates the Stone of Leo's Hill from its various local rivals, is its chameleon-like power of taking tone and colour from every element it touches. While Purbeck marble, for instance, must always remain the same dark, opaque, slippery thing it was when it left its Dorset coast; while Portland stone can do nothing but grow gloomier and gloomier, in its ashen-grey moroseness, under the weight of the London fogs; the tawny progeny of

this tyrant of the western vales becomes amber-streaked when it restricts the play of fountains, orange-tinted when it protects herbacious borders, and rich as a petrified sunset when it drinks the evening light from the mellow front of a Cathedral Tower.

Apart from any geological affinity, it might almost seem as though this Leonian stone possessed some weird occult relation to those deep alluvial deposits which render the lanes and fields about Nevilton so thick with heavy earth.

Though closer in its texture to sand than to clay, it is with clay that its local usage is more generally associated, and it is into a clay-bed that it crumbles at last, when the earth retakes her own. Its prevailing colour is rather the colour of clay than of sand, and no material that could be found could lend itself more congruously to the clinging consistence of a clay floor.

It would be impossible to conceive of a temple of marble or Portland stone rising out of the embrace of the thick Nevilton soil. But Leonian sandstone seems no more than a concentrated petrifaction of such soil — its natural evocation, its organic expression. The soil calls out upon it day and night with friendly recognition, and day and night it answers the call. There is thus no escape for the human victims of these two accomplices. In confederate reciprocity the stone receives them from the clay, and the clay receives them from the stone. They pass from homes built irretrievably of the one, into smaller and more permanent houses, dug irretrievably out of the other.

The character of the soil in that corner of Somerset-

shire is marked, beyond everything else, by the clinging tenacity of its soft, damp, treacherous earth. It is a spot loved by the west-wind, and by the rains brought by the west-wind. Overshadowed by the lavish fertility of its abounding foliage, it never seems to experience enough sunshine to draw out of it the eternal presence of this oppressive dampness. The lush pastures may thicken, the rich gardens blossom, the ancient orchards ripen; but an enduring sense of something depressing and deep and treacherous lurks ever in the background of these pleasant things. Not a field but has its overshadowing trees; and not a tree but has its roots loosely buried in that special kind of soft, heavy earth, which an hour's rain can change into clinging mud.

It is in the Nevilton churchyard, when a new grave is being dug, that this sinister peculiarity of the earth-floor is especially noticeable. The sight of those raw, rough heaps of yellow clay, tossed out upon grass and flowers, is enough to make the living shrink back in terror from the oblong hole into which they have consigned their dead. All human cemeteries smell, like the hands of the Shakespearean king, of forlorn mortality; but such mortality seems more palpably, more oppressively emphasized among the graves of Nevilton than in other repositories of the dead. To be buried in many a burying-ground one knows, would be no more than a negative terror; no more than to be deprived, as Homer puts it, of the sweet privilege of the blessed air. But to be buried in Nevilton clay has a positive element in its dreadfulness. It is not so much to be buried, as to be sucked in, drawn down, devoured, absorbed. Never

in any place does the peculiar congruity between the yellowness of the local clay and the yellowness of the local stone show so luridly as among these patient hillocks.

The tombstones here do not relieve the pressure of fate by appealing, in marble whiteness, away from the anthropophagous earth, to the free clouds of heaven. They are of the earth, and they conspire with the earth. They yearn to the soil, and the soil yearns to them. They weigh down upon the poor relics consigned to their care, in a hideous partnership with the clay that is working its will upon them.

And the rank vegetation of the place assists this treachery. Orange-tinted lichen and rusty-red weather-stains alternate with the encroachments of moss and weeds in reducing each separate protruding slab into conformity with what is about it and beneath it. This churchyard, whose stone and clay so cunningly intermingle, is in an intimate sense the very navel and centre of the village. Above it rises the tall perpendicular tower of St. Catharine's church; and beyond it, on the further side of a strip of pasture a stagnant pond, and a solitary sycamore, stands the farm that is locally named "the Priory." This house, the most imposing of all in the village except the Manor, has as its immediate background the umbrageous conical eminence where the Holy Rood was found. It is a place adapted to modern usage from a noble fragment of monastic ruin. Here, in mediæval days, rose a rich Cistercian abbey, to which, doubtless, the pyramidal mount, in the background, offered a store of consecrated legends.

North of the churchyard, beyond the main village

street with its formal town-like compactness, the ground slopes imperceptibly up, past a few enclosed cottage-orchards, to where, embosomed in gracious trees and Italianated gardens, stands the pride and glory of Nevilton, its stately Elizabethan house.

This house, founded in the reign of Henry VIII, synchronized in its foundation with the overthrow of the Cistercian Order, and was constructed entirely of Leonian stone, removed for the purpose of building it from the scene of the Priory's destruction. Twice over, then, in their human history, since they left the entrails of that brooding monster over which the Nevilton people see the sun set each day, had these carved pieces of sandstone contributed to the pride of the rulers of men.

Their first use had not been attended with an altogether propitious destiny. How far their present use will prove of happier omen remains a secret of the adamantine Fates. The imaginary weaving of events, upon which we are just now engaged, may perhaps serve, as certain liturgical formulæ of propitiation served in former days, as a means of averting the wrath of the Eumenides. For though made use of again and again for fair and pious purposes, something of the old heathen malignity of the Druid hill still seems to hang about the stone it yields; and over the substance of that stone's destiny the two Mythologies still struggle; Power and Sacrifice dividing the living and the dead.

CHAPTER II

NEVILTON

UNTIL within some twenty years of the date with which we are now concerned, the distinguished family who originally received the monastic estates from the royal despot had held them intact and unassailed. By an evil chance however, the property had extended itself, during the eighteenth century, so as to include the larger portion of Leo's Hill; and since that day its possession had been attended by misfortune. The ancient aboriginal fortress proved as fatal to its modern invaders as it had proved in remoter times to Roman, Saxon and Norman.

A fanciful imagination might indeed have amused itself with the curious dream, that some weird Druidic curse had been laid upon that grass-grown island of yellow rock, bringing disaster and eclipse to all who meddled with it. Such an imagination would have been able to fortify its fancy by recalling the suggestive fact that at the bottom of the large woodland pond, indicated in this narrative under the name of Auber Lake, was discovered, not many years before, an immense slab of Leonian stone, inscribed with symbols baffling interpretation, but suggesting, to one antiquarian mind at least, a hint of pre-historic Devil-Worship. However this may be, it is certain that the family of Seldom found themselves finally faced

with the alternative of selling the place they loved or of seeing it lapse under their hands into confusion and neglect. Of these evil alternatives they chose the former; and thus the estates, properties, royalties, and appurtenances, of the historic Manor of Nevilton fell into the hands of a clever financier from Lombard Street.

The family of Mr. Mortimer Romer had never at any time bowed its knee in kings' houses. Nor were its religious antecedents marked by orthodox reputation. Mr. Romer was indeed in every sense of the word a "self-made man." But though neither Christian nor Jew, — for his grandfather, the fish-monger of Soho, had been of the Unitarian persuasion — it cannot be denied that he possessed the art of making himself thoroughly respected by both the baptized and the circumcised. He indeed pursued his main purpose, which was the acquiring of power, with an unscrupulousness worthy of a Roman Emperor. Possibly it was this Roman tenacity in him, combined with his heathen indifference to current theology, which propitiated the avenging deities of Leo's Hill. So far at any rate he had been eminently successful in his speculations. He had secured complete possession of every quarry on the formidable eminence; and the company of which he was both director and president was pursuing its activities in a hundred new directions. It had, in the few last years, gone so far as to begin certain engineering assaults upon those remote portions of the ancient escarpments that had been left untouched since the legions of Claudius Caesar encamped under their protection.

The bulk of Mr. Romer's stone-works were on the

Hill itself; but others, intended for the more delicate finishing touches, were situated in a convenient spot close to Nevilton Station. Out of these sheds and yards, built along the railway-track, arose, from morning to night, the monotonous, not unpleasing, murmur of wheels and saws and grindstones. The contrast between these sounds and the sylvan quietness of the vicarage garden, which sloped down towards them, was one of the most significant indications of the clash of the Two Mythologies in this place. The priest meditating among his roses upon the vanity of all but "heavenly habitations" might have been in danger of being too obtrusively reminded of the pride of the houses that are very definitely "made with hands." Perhaps this was one of the reasons why the present incumbent of Nevilton had preferred a more undisturbed retreat.

The general manager of Mortimer Romer's quarries was a certain Mr. Lickwit, who served also as his confidential adviser in many other spheres.

The works at Nevilton Station were left to the superintendence of two brothers named Andersen, skilled stone-cutters, sons of the famous Gideon Andersen known to architects all over the kingdom for his designs in Leonian stone. Both Gideon and his wife Naomi were buried in Nevilton churchyard, and the brothers were condemned in the village as persons of an almost scandalous piety because of their innocent habit of lingering on warm summer evenings over their parents' grave. They lived together, these two, as lodgers with the stationmaster, in a newly built cottage close to their work. Their social position in the place was a curious and

anomalous one. Their father's reputation as a sculptor had brought him into touch with every grade of society; and the woman who became his wife was by birth what is usually termed a lady. Gideon himself had been a rough and gross fellow; and after his wife's death had hastened to take his sons away from school and apprentice them to his own trade. They were in many respects a noteworthy pair, though scarcely favourites, either with their fellow-workmen or their manager.

James Andersen, the elder by some ten years, was of a morose, reserved temper, and though a capable workman never seemed happy in the workshop. Luke, on the contrary, possessed a peculiarly sunny and serene spirit.

They were both striking in appearance. The younger approximated to that conventional type of beauty which is popularly known as being "like a Greek god." The elder, tall, swarthy, and sinister, suggested rather the image of some gloomy idol carved on the wall of an Assyrian temple. What, however, was much more remarkable than their appearance was their devoted attachment to one another. They lived, worked, ate, drank, walked and slept together. It was impossible to separate them. Had Mr. Lickwit dismissed James, Luke would immediately have thrown down his tools. Had Luke been the banished one, James would have followed him into exile.

It had fallen to Mr. Romer, some seven years before our narrative begins, to appoint a new vicar to Nevilton; and he had appointed one of such fierce ascetic zeal and such pronounced socialistic

sympathies, that he had done nothing since but vehemently and bitterly repent his choice.

The Promotor of Companies had been betrayed into this blunder by the impulse of revengeful caprice, the only impulse in his otherwise well-balanced nature that might be termed dangerous to himself.

He had quarrelled with the bishop over some matter connected with his stone-works; and in order to cause this distinguished prelate grief and annoyance he had looked about for someone to honour who was under the episcopal ban. The bishop, however, was of so discreet a temper and so popular in his diocese that the only rebel to his authority that could be discovered was one of the curates of a church at Yeoborough who had insisted upon preaching the Roman doctrine of Transubstantiation.

The matter would probably have lapsed into quiescence, save for the crafty interference in the local newspaper of a group of aggressive Nonconformists, who took this opportunity of sowing desirable dissension between the higher and lower orders of the hated Establishment.

Mr. Romer, who, like Gallio, cared for none of these things, and was at heart a good deal worse than a Nonconformist, seized upon the chance offered by the death of Nevilton's vicar; and installed as his successor this rebel to ecclesiastical authority.

Once installed, however, the Rev. Hugh Clavering speedily came to an understanding with his bishop; compromised on the matter of preaching Transub-

stantiation; and apparently was allowed to go on believing in it.

And it was then that the Promoter of Companies learned for the first time how much easier it is to make a priest than to unmake him. For situation after situation arose in which the master of the Leonian quarries found himself confronted by an alien Power — a Power that refused to worship Sandstone. Before this rupture, however, the young Priest had persuaded Mr. Romer to let him live in the Old Vicarage, a small but cheerful house just opposite the church door. The orthodox vicarage, a rambling Early Victorian structure standing in its own grounds at the end of the West Drive, was let — once more at the Priest's suggestion — to the last living representatives of the dispossessed Seldoms.

It indicated a good deal of spirit on the part of Valentia Seldom and her daughter thus to return to the home of their ancestors.

Mrs. Seldom was a cousin of the man who had sold the estate. Her daughter Vennie, brought up in a school at Florence, had never seen Nevilton, and it was with the idea of taking advantage for the girl's sake of their old prestige in that corner of England that Valentia accepted Mr. Romer's offer and became the vicarage tenant.

The quarry-owner himself was influenced in carrying through this affair, by his anxiety, for the sake of *his* daughter, to secure a firmer footing with the aristocracy of the neighborhood. Here again, however, he was destined to disappointment: for once in possession of her twenty years' lease the old lady

showed not the least intention of letting herself be used as a social stepping-stone.

She had, indeed, under her own roof, cause enough for preoccupation and concern.

Her daughter — a little ghost-moth of a girl, of fragile delicacy — seemed entirely devoid of that mysterious magnetic attraction which lures to the side of most virgins the devotion of the opposite sex. She appeared perfectly content to remain forever in her tender maidenhood, and refused to exert the slightest effort to be "nice" to the charming young people her mother threw in her way. She belonged to that class of young girls who seem to be set apart by nature for other purposes than those of the propagation of the race.

Her wistful spirit, shrinking into itself like the leaves of a sensitive plant at the least approach of a rough hand, responded only to one passionate impulse, the impulse of religion.

She grew indeed so estranged from the normal world, that it was not only Valentia who concealed the thought that when she left the earth the ancient race of Seldoms would leave it with her.

Nor was it only in regard to her child's religious obsession that the lady suffered. She had flatly refused to let her enter into anything but the coldest relations with "those dreadful people at the House"; and it was with a peculiar shock of dismay that she found that the girl was not literally obeying her. It was not, however, to the Romers themselves that Vennie made her shy overtures, but to a luckless little relative of that family now domiciled with them as companion to Gladys Romer.

This young dependent, reputed in the village to be of Italian origin, struck the gentle heart of the last of the Seldoms with indescribable pity. She could not altogether define the impression the girl produced upon her, but it was a singularly oppressive one, and it vexed and troubled her.

The situation was wretchedly complicated. It was extremely difficult to get a word with the little companion without encountering Gladys; and any approach to intimacy with "the Romer girl" would have meant an impossible scene with Mrs. Seldom. Nor was it a light undertaking, in such hurried interviews as she did manage to secure, to induce the child to drop her reserve. She would fix her great brown foreign eyes — her name was Lacrima Traffio — on Vennie's face, and make curious little helpless gestures with her hands when questions were asked her; but speak of herself she would not.

It was clear she was absolutely dependent on her cousins. Vennie gathered as much as that, as she once talked with her under the church wall, when Gladys was chatting with the vicar. A reference to her own people had nearly resulted in an outburst of tears. Vennie had had to be content with a broken whisper: "We come from Rapallo — they are all dead." There was nothing, it appeared, that could be added to this.

It was perhaps a little inconsistent in the old lady to be so resolute against her daughter's overtures to Lacrima, as she herself had no hesitation in making a sort of protégé of another of Mr. Romer's tribe.

This was an eccentric middle-aged bachelor who had drifted into the place soon after the newcomer's

arrival and had established himself in a dilapidated cottage on the outskirts of the Auber woods.

Remotely related to Mrs. Romer, he had in some way become dependent on her husband, whose financial advantage over him was not, it seemed, as time went on, exerted in a very considerate manner.

Maurice Quincunx, for such was his unusual name, was an illegitimate descendant of one of the most historic houses in the neighborhood, but both his poverty and his opinions caused him to live what was practically the life of a hermit, and made him shrink away, even more nervously than little Vennie Seldom, from any intercourse with his equals.

The present possessors of his queer ancient name were now the Lords of Glastonbury, and had probably never so much as heard of Maurice's existence.

He would come by stealth to pay Valentia visits, preferring the evening hours when in the summer she used to sit with her work, on a terrace overlooking a sloping orchard, and watch Vennie water her roses.

The vicarage terrace was a place of extraordinary quiet and peace, eminently adapted to the low-voiced, nervous ramblings of a recluse of Maurice Quincunx's timidity.

The old lady by degrees quite won this eccentric's heart; and the queerly assorted friends would pace up and down for hours in the cool of the evening talking of things in no way connected either with Mr. Romer or the Church — the two subjects about which Mr. Quincunx held dangerously strong views.

Apart from this quaint outcast and the youthful parson, Mrs. Seldom's only other intimate in the

place was a certain John Francis Taxater, a gentleman of independent means, living by himself with an old housekeeper in a cottage called The Gables, situated about half-way between the vicarage and the village.

Mr. Taxater was a Catholic and also a philosopher; these two peculiarities affording the solution to what otherwise would have been an insoluble psychic riddle. Even as it was, Mr. Taxater's mind was of so subtle and complicated an order, that he was at once the attraction and the despair of all the religious thinkers of that epoch. For it must be understood that though quietly resident under the shadow of Nevilton Mount, the least essay from Mr. Taxater's pen was eagerly perused by persons interested in religious controversy in all the countries of Europe.

He wrote for philosophical journals in London, Paris, Rome and New York; and there often appeared at The Gables most surprising visitors from Germany and Italy and Spain.

He had a powerful following among the more subtle-minded of the Catholics of England; and was highly respected by important personages in the social, as well as the literary circles, of Catholic society.

The profundity of his mind may be gauged from the fact that he was able to steer his way successfully through the perilous reefs of "modernistic" discussion, without either committing himself to heretical doctrine or being accused of reactionary ultramontanism.

Mr. Taxater's written works were, however, but a trifling portion of his personality. His intellectual

interests were as rich and varied as those of some great humanist of the Italian Renaissance, and his personal habits were as involved and original as his thoughts were complicated and deep.

He was perpetually engaged in converting the philosopher in him to Catholicism, and the Catholic in him to philosophy — yet he never permitted either of these obsessions to interfere with his enjoyment of life.

Luke Andersen, who was perhaps of all the inhabitants of Nevilton most conscious of the drama played around him, used to maintain that it was impossible to tell in the last resort whether Mr. Taxater's place was with the adherents of Christ or with the adherents of Anti-Christ. Like his prototype, the evasive Erasmus, he seemed able to be on both sides at the same time.

Perhaps it was a secret consciousness of the singular position of Nevilton, planted, as it were, between two streams of opposing legend, that originally led Mr. Taxater to take up his abode in so secluded a spot.

It is impossible to tell. In this as in all other transactions of his life he combined an unworldly simplicity with a Machiavellian astuteness. If the Day of Judgment revealed him as being on the side of the angels, it might also reveal him as having exercised, in the microcosmic Nevilton drama, as well as in his wider sphere, one of the most subtle influences against the Powers of Darkness that those Powers ever encountered in their invisible activity.

At the moment when the present narrative takes up the woven threads of these various persons' lives

there seemed every prospect that in external nature at least there was going to be an auspicious and halcyon season. June had opened with abnormal pleasantness. Exquisite odours were in the air, wafted from woods and fields and gardens. White dust, alternating with tender spots of coolness where the shadows of trees fell, lent the roads in the vicinity that leisured gala-day expectancy which one notes in the roads of France and Spain, but which is so rare in England.

It seemed almost as though the damp sub-soil of the place had relaxed its malign influence; as though the yellow clay in the churchyard had ceased its calling for victims; and as though the brooding monster in the sunset, from which every day half the men of the village returned with their spades and picks, had put aside, as irrelevant to a new and kindlier epoch, its ancient hostility to the Christian dwellers in that quiet valley.

CHAPTER III

OLYMPIAN CONSPIRACY

THE depths of Mr. Romer's mind, as he paced up and down the Leonian pavement under the east front of his house on one of the early days of this propitious June, were seething with predatory projects. The last of the independent quarries on the Hill had just fallen into his hands after a legal process of more than usual chicanery, conducted in person by the invaluable Mr. Lickwit.

He was now occupied in pushing through Parliament a bill for the reduction of railway freight charges, so that the expense of carrying his stone to its various destinations might be materially reduced. But it was not only of financial power that he thought as the smell of the roses from the sun-baked walls floated in upon him across the garden.

The man's commercial preoccupations had not by any means, as so often happens, led to the atrophy of his more personal instincts.

His erotic appetite, for instance, remained as insatiable as ever. Age did not dull, nor finance wither, that primordial craving. The aphrodisiac instincts in Mortimer Romer were, however, much less simple than might be supposed.

In this hyper-sensual region he had more claim to artistic subtlety than his enemies realized. He rarely allowed himself the direct expansion of frank

and downright lasciviousness. His little pleasures were indirect, elaborate, far-fetched.

He afforded really the interesting spectacle of one whose mind was normal, energetic, dynamic; but whose senses were slow, complicated, fastidious. He was a formidable forward-marching machine, with a heart of elaborate perversity. He was a thick-skinned philistine with the sensuality of a sybarite.

I do not mean to imply that there was any lack of rapacity in the senses of Mr. Romer. His senses were indeed unfathomable in their devouring depths. But they were liable to fantastic caprices. They were not the simple animal senses of a Gothic barbarian. They assumed imperial contortions.

The main eccentricity of the erotic tendencies of this remarkable man lay in the elaborate pleasure he derived from his sense of power. The actual lure of the flesh had little attraction for him. What pleased him was a slow tightening of his grip upon people—upon their wills, their freedom, their personality.

Any impression a person might make upon Mr. Romer's senses was at once transformed into a desire to have that person absolutely at his mercy. The thought that he held such a one reduced to complete spiritual helplessness alone satisfied him.

The first time he had encountered Lacrima Traffio he had been struck by her appealing eyes, her fragile figure, her frightened gestures. Deep in his perverted heart he had desired her; but his desire, under the psychic law I have endeavoured to explain, quickly resolved itself into a resolution to take possession of her, not as his mistress, but as his slave.

Nor did the subtle elaboration of his perversity

stop there. It were easy and superficial to dominate in his own person so helpless a dependent. What was less easy was to reduce her to submission to the despotic caprices of his daughter, a girl only a few years older than Lacrima herself.

The enjoyment of a sense of vicarious power was a satisfaction curiously provocative to his predatory craving. Nor did subtlety of the situation stop at that point. It was not only necessary that the girl who attracted him should be at his daughter's mercy; it was necessary that his daughter should not be unconscious of the rôle she herself played. It was necessary that they should be in a sense confederates in this game of cat-and-mouse.

As Mr. Romer paced the terrace of his imposing mansion a yet profounder triumph presented itself in the recesses of his imperial nature.

He had lately introduced into his "entourage" a certain brother-in-law of his, the widower of his sister, a man named John Goring. This individual was of a much simpler, grosser type than the recondite quarry-owner. He was, indeed, no more than a narrow-minded, insolent, avaricious animal. He lacked even the superficial gentility of his formidable relation. Nor had his concentrated but unintelligent avarice brought him, so far, any great wealth. He still remained, in spite of Romer's help, what he had been born, an English farmer of unpropitiating manners and supernal greed.

The Promoter of Companies was, however, not unaware, any more than was Augustus Caesar, of the advantage accruing to a despot from the possession of devoted, if unattractive, tools; and contemp-

tuously risking the shock to his social prestige of such an apparition in the neighborhood, he had secured Mr. Goring as a permanent tenant of the largest farm on his estate. This was no other than the Priory Farm, with its gentle monastic memories. What the last Prior of Nevilton would have thought could he have left his grave under St. Catherine's altar and reappeared among his dovecotes it is distressing to surmise. He would doubtless have drawn from the sight of John Goring a profoundly edifying moral as to the results of royal interference with Christ's Holy Church. Nor is it likely that an encounter with Mr. Romer himself would have caused less astonishment to his mediæval spirit. He would, indeed, have recognized that what is now called Progress is no mere scientific phrase; but a most devastating reality. He would have found that Nevilton had "progressed" very far. He would have believed that the queer stone-devils that his monks had carved, half emerging from the eaves of the church-roof, had got quite loose and gone abroad among men. Had he probed, in the manner of clairvoyant saints, the troubled recesses of Mr. Romer's mind as that gentleman inhaled the sweet noon air, he would have cried aloud his indignation and made the sign of the cross as if over a mortuary of spiritual decomposition.

For as the mid-day sun of that hot June morning culminated, and the clear hard shadows fell, sharp and thin, upon the orange-tinted pavement, it entered Mr. Romer's head that he might make a more personal use of his farmer-brother than had until now been possible.

With this idea in his brain he entered the house and sought his wife in her accustomed place at the corner of the large reception-hall. He sat down forthright by the side of her mahogany table and lit a cigar. As Mr. Romer was the species of male animal that might be written down in the guide-book of some Martian visitor as "the cigar-smoking variety" his wife would have taken her place among "the sedentary knitting ones."

She was a large, fair, plump, woman, as smooth and pallid as her husband was grizzled and ruddy. Her obsequious deference to her lord's views was only surpassed by her lethargic animal indolence. She was like a great, tame, overgrown, white-skinned Puma. Her eyes had the greenish tint of feline eyes, and something of their daylight contraction. Her use of spectacles did not modify this tendency, but rather increased it; for the effect of the round glass orbs pushed up upon her forehead was to enhance the malicious gleam of the little narrow-lidded slits that peered out beneath them.

It may be imagined with what weary and ironical detachment the solemn historic portraits of the ancient Seldoms — for the pictures and furniture had been sold with the house — looked out from their gilded frames upon these ambiguous intruders. But neither husband nor wife felt the least touch of "compunctious visiting" as they made themselves at ease under that immense contempt.

"I have been thinking," said Mr. Romer, puffing a thick cloud of defiant smoke into the air, so that it went sailing up to the very feet of a delicate Reynolds portrait; "I have been thinking that I am

really quite unjustified in going on with that allowance to Quincunx. He ought to realize that he has completely exhausted the money your aunt left him. He ought to face the situation, instead of quietly accepting our gift as if it were his right. And they tell me he does not even keep a civil tongue in his head. Lickwit was only complaining the other day about his tampering with our workmen. He has been going about for some time with those damned Andersen fellows, and no doubt encouraging them in their confounded impertinence.

I don't like the man, my dear;—that is the plain truth. I have never liked him; and he has certainly never even attempted to conceal his dislike of me.

"He is very polite to your face, Mortimer," murmured the lady.

"Exactly," Mr. Romer rejoined, "to my face he is more than polite. He is obsequious; he is cringing. But behind my back — damn him! — the rascal is a rattlesnake."

"Well, dear, no doubt it has all worked out for the best,"; purred the plump woman, softly counting the threads of her knitting. "You were in need of Aunt's money at the time — in great need of it."

"I know I was," replied the Promoter of Companies, "I know I was; and he knows I was. That is why I have been giving him six per cent on what he lent me. But the fellow has had more than that. He has had more by this time than the whole original sum; and I tell you, Susan, it's got to end; — its got to end here, now, and forever!"

Mr. Romer's cigar-smoke had now floated up above the feet of the Reynolds Portrait and was invading

its gentle and melancholy face. It was a portrait of a young girl in the court-dress of the time, but with such pathetic nun-like features that it was clear that little Vennie was not the only one of her race to have grown weary of this rough world.

"It is a providential thing, dear," whispered the knitting female, "that there were no horrid documents drawn up about that money. Maurice cannot impose upon us in that way."

"He is doing worse," answered her husband. "He is imposing upon us on the strength of a disgusting sort of sickly sentiment. He has had all his money back and more; and he knows he has. But he wants to go on living on my money while he abuses me on every occasion. Do you know, he even preaches in that confounded social meeting? I shall have that affair put a stop to, one of these days. It is only an excuse for spreading dissatisfaction in the village. Lickwit has complained to me about it more than once. He says that Socialistic scoundrel Wone is simply using the meeting to canvass for his election. You know he is going to stand, in place of Sir Herbert Ratcliffe? What the Liberal Party is doing I cannot conceive — pandering to these slimy windbags! And your blessed relation backs him up. The thing is monstrous, outrageous! Here am I, allowing this fellow a hundred a year to live in idleness; and he is plotting against me at my very doorstep."

"Perhaps he does not know that the Conservative member is going to retire in your favour," insinuated the lady.

"Know? Of course he knows! All the village knows. All the country knows. You can never hide

things of that kind. He knows, and he is deliberately working against me."

"It would be nice if he could get a place as a clerk," suggested Mr. Quincunx's relative, pensively. "It certainly does not seem fair that you, who work so hard for the money you make, should support him in complete idleness."

Mr. Romer looked at her thoughtfully, knocking the ashes from his cigar. "I believe you have hit it there, my dear," he said. Then he smiled in a manner peculiarly malignant. "Yes, it would be very nice if he could get a place as a clerk — a place where he would have plenty of simple office work — a place where he would be kept to his desk, and not allowed to roam the country corrupting honest workmen. Yes, you are quite right, Susan; a clerk's place is what this Quincunx wants. And, by Heaven, what he shall have! I'll bring the affair to a head at once. I'll put it to him that your aunt's money is at an end, and that I have already paid him back in full all that he lent me. I'll put it to him that he is now in my debt. In fact, that he is now entirely dependent on me to the tune of a hundred a year. And I'll explain to him that he must either go out into the world and shift for himself, as better men than he have had to do, or enter Lickwit's office, either in Yeoborough or on the Hill."

"He will enter the office, Mortimer," murmured the lady; "he will enter the office. Maurice is not the man to emigrate, or do anything of that kind. Besides he has a reason"—here her voice became so extremely mellifluous that it might almost be said to have liquefied — "to stay in Nevilton."

"What's this?" cried Romer, getting up and throwing his cigar out of the window. "You don't mean to tell me — eh? — that this scarecrow is in love with Gladys?"

The lady purred softly and replaced her spectacles. "Oh dear no! What an idea! Oh certainly, certainly not! But Gladys, you know, is not the only girl in Nevilton."

"Who the devil is it then? Not Vennie Seldom, surely?"

"Look nearer, Mortimer, look nearer"; murmured the lady with sibilant sweetness.

"Not Lacrima! You don't mean to say —"

"Why, dear, you needn't be so surprised. You look more angry than if it had been Gladys herself. Yes, of course it is Lacrima. Hadn't you observed it? But you dear men are so stupid, aren't you, in these things?"

Mrs. Romer rubbed one white hand over the other; and beamed upon her husband through her spectacles.

Mr. Romer frowned. "But the Traffio girl is so, so — you know what I mean."

"So quiet and unimpressionable. Ah! my dear, it is just these quiet girls who are the very ones to be enjoying themselves on the sly."

"How far has this thing gone, Susan?"

"Oh you needn't get excited, Mortimer. It has not really 'gone' anywhere. It has hardly begun. In fact I have not the least authority for saying that she cares for him at all. I think she does a little, though. I *think* she does. But one never can tell. I can, however, give you my word that he cares for

her. And that is what we were talking about, weren't we?"

"I shall pack him off to my office in London," said Mr. Romer.

"He wouldn't go, my dear. I tell you he wouldn't go."

"But he can't live on nothing."

"He can. He will. Sooner than leave Nevilton Maurice would eat grass. He would become lay-reader or something. He would sponge on Mrs. Seldom."

"Well, then he shall walk to Yeoborough and back every day. That will cool his blood for him."

"That will do him a great deal of good, dear; a great deal of good. Auntie always used to say that Maurice ought to take more exercise."

"Lickwit will exercise him! Make no mistake about that."

"How you do look round you, dear, in all these things! How impossible it is for anyone to fool *you*, Mortimer!"

As Mrs. Romer uttered these words she glanced up at the Reynolds portrait above their heads, as if half-suspecting that such fawning flattery would bring down the mockery of the little Lady-in-Waiting.

"I can't help thinking Lacrima would make a very good wife to some hard-working sensible man," Mr. Romer remarked.

His lady looked a little puzzled. "It would be difficult to find so suitable a companion for Gladys," she said.

"Oh, of course I don't mean till Gladys is married,"

said the quarry-owner quickly. "By the way, when *is* she going to accept that young fool of an Ilminster?"

"All in good time, my dear, all in good time," purred his wife. "He has not proposed to her yet."

"It's very curious," remarked Mr. Romer pensively, "that a young man of such high connections should *wish* to marry our daughter."

"What things you say, Mortimer! Isn't Gladys going to inherit all this property? Don't you suppose that a younger son of Lord Tintinhull would jump at the idea of being master of this house?"

"He won't be master of it while *I* live," said Mr. Romer grimly.

"In my opinion he never will be"; added the lady. "I don't think Gladys really intends to accept him."

"She'll marry somebody, I hope?" said the master sharply.

"O yes she'll marry, soon enough. Only it'll be a cleverer man, and a richer man, than young Ilminster."

"Have you any other pleasant little romance to fling at me?"

"O no. But I know what our dear Gladys is. I know what she is looking out for."

"When she does marry," said Mr. Romer, "we shall have to think seriously what is to become of Lacrima. Look here, my dear," — it was wonderful, the pleasant ejaculatory manner in which this flash of inspiration was thrown out, — "why not marry her to John? She would be just the person for a farmer's wife."

Mrs. Romer, to do her justice, showed signs of being a little shocked at this proposal.

"But John," — she stammered; — "John — is not — exactly — a marrying person, is he?"

"He is — what I wish him to be"; was her husband's haughty answer.

"Oh well, of course, dear, it's as you think best. Certainly" — the good woman could not resist this little thrust — "its John's only chance of marrying a lady. For Lacrima is *that* — with all her faults."

"I shall talk to John about it"; said the Promoter of Companies. Feline thing though she was, Susan Romer could not refrain from certain inward qualms when she thought of the fragile hyper-sensitive Italian in the embraces of John Goring. What on earth set her husband dreaming of such a thing? But he was subject to strange caprices now and then; and it was more dangerous to balk him in these things than in his most elaborate financial plots. She had found that out already. So, on the present occasion, she made no further remark, than a reiterated — "How you do look all round you, Mortimer! It is not easy for anyone to fool *you*."

She rose from her seat and collected her knitting. "I must go and see where Gladys is," she said.

Mr. Romer followed her to the door, and went out again upon the terrace. The little nun-like Lady-in-Waiting looked steadily out across the room, her pinched attenuated features expressing nothing but patient weariness of all the ways of this mortal world.

CHAPTER IV

REPRISALS FROM BELOW

IT was approaching the moment consecrated to the close of the day's labour in the stone-works by Nevilton railway-station. The sky was cloudless; the air windless. It was one of those magical arrests of the gliding feet of time, which afternoons in June sometimes bring with them, holding back, as it were, all living processes of life, in sweet and lingering suspense. The steel tracks of the railway-line glittered in the sun. In the fields, that sloped away beyond them, the browsing cattle wore that unruffled air of abysmal indifference, which seems to make one day in their sight to be as a thousand years. To these placid earth-children, drawing the centuries together in solemn continuity, the tribes of men and their turbulent drama were but as vapours that came and went. The high elms in the hedges had already assumed that dark monotonous foliage which gives to their patient stillness on such a day an atmosphere of monumental expectancy. A flock of newly-sheared sheep, clean and shining in the hot sun, drifted in crowded procession down the narrow road, leaving a cloud of white dust behind them that remained stationary in the air long after they had passed. In the open stone-yard close to the road the brothers Andersen were working together, chipping and hammering with bare arms at an enormous Leo-

nian slab, carving its edges into delicate mouldings. The younger of the two wore no hat, and his closely clipped fair curls and loose shirt open at the throat, lent him, as he moved about his work with easy gestures, a grace and charm well adapted to that auspicious hour.

A more sombre form by his brother's side, his broad brimmed hat low down over his forehead, the elder Andersen went on with his carving, in imperturbable morose absorption.

Watching them with languid interest, their arms linked together, stood the figures of two girls. The yellow dust from the sandstone rose intermittently into the air, mingling with the white dust from the road and settling, as it sank earthward, upon the leaves of the yet unbudded knapweed and scabious which grew in the thin dusty grass.

Between Gladys and her cousin — for the girls had wandered as far as this in search of distraction after their lazy tea on the great lawn — a curious contrast was now displayed.

Gladys, with slow provocative interest, was intent on every movement of Luke's graceful figure. Lacrima's attention wandered wistfully away, to the cattle and the orchards, and then to the sheep, which now were being penned in a low line of spacious railway trucks.

Luke himself was by no means unaware of the condescending interest of his master's daughter. He paused in his work once or twice. He turned up his shirt-sleeves still higher. He bent down, to blow away the dust from the moulding he had made. Something very like a flash of amorous admiration

passed across his blue eyes as he permitted them slyly to wander from Gladys' head to her waist, and from her waist to her shoes. She certainly was an alluring figure as she stood there in her thin white dress. The hand which pulled her skirt away from the dust showed as soft and warm as if it were pleading for a caress, and the rounded contours of her bosom looked as if they had ripened with the early peaches, under the walls of her stately garden. She presently unlinked her arm from her companion's, and sliding it softly round Lacrima's side drew the girl close against her. As she did this she permitted a slow amorous glance of deliberate tantalization to play upon the young carver. How well Luke Andersen knew that especial device of maidens when they are together — that way they have of making their playful, innocent caresses such a teasing incentive! And Luke knew well how to answer all this. Nothing could have surpassed in subtle diplomacy the manner in which he responded, without responding, to the amorous girl's overtures. He let her realize that he himself understood precisely the limits of the situation; that she was perfectly at liberty to enter a mock-flirtation with him, without the remotest risk of any "faux pas" on his part spoiling the delicacy of their relations.

What was indeed obvious to her, without the necessity of any such unspoken protestation, was the fact that he found her eminently desirable. Nor did her pride as "the girl up at the house" quarrel with her vanity as the simple object of Luke's admiration. She wanted him to desire her as a girl; — to desire her to madness. And then she wanted to flout him, with her pretensions as a lady. This particular

occasion was by no means the first time she had drifted casually down the vicarage hill and lingered beside the stone-cutters. It was, however, an epoch in their curious relations. For the first time since she had been attracted to him, she deliberately moved close up to the stone he worked at, and entered into conversation. While this occurred, Lacrima, released from her rôle as the accomplice of amorous teasing, wandered away, picking listlessly the first red poppies of the year, which though less flaunting in their bold splendour than those of her childhood's memories, were at least the same immortal classical flowers.

As she bent down in this assuaging pastime, letting her thoughts wander so far from Nevilton and its tyrants, Lacrima became suddenly conscious that James Andersen had laid down his tools, resumed his coat, and was standing by her side.

"A beautiful evening, Miss"; he said respectfully, holding his hat in his hand and regarding her with grave gentleness.

"Yes, isn't it?" she answered at once; and then was silent; while a sigh she could not suppress rose from the depths of her heart. For her thoughts reverted to another fair evening, in the days when England was no more than a name; and a sudden overpowering longing for kind voices, and the shadows of olives on warm hill-sides, rushed, like a wave, over her.

"This must be near the Angelus-hour," she thought; and somehow the dark grave eyes of the man beside her and his swarthy complexion made her think of those familiar forms that used to pass driving

their goats before them up the rocky paths of the Apennine range.

"You are unhappy, Miss," said James in a low voice; and these words, the only ones of genuine personal tenderness, except for poor Maurice's, that had struck her sense for the last twelve months, brought tears to her eyes. Vennie Seldom had spoken kindly to her; but — God knows — there is a difference between the kindness even of the gentlest saint and this direct spontaneous outflow of one heart to another. She smiled; a little mournful smile.

"Yes; I was thinking of my own country," she murmured.

"You are an Italian, Miss; I know it"; continued Andersen, instinctively leading her further away from the two golden heads that now were bending so close together over the Leonian stone.

"I often think of Italy," he went on; "I think I should be at home in Italy. I love everything I hear of it, everything I read of it. It comes from my mother, this feeling. She was a lady, you know Miss, as well born as any and with a passionate love of books. She used to read Dante in that little 'Temple' Series, which perhaps you have seen, with the Italian on one side and the English on the other. I never look at that book without thinking of her."

"You have many books yourself, I expect,— Mr. — Andersen. You see I know your name." And Lacrima smiled, the first perfectly happy smile she had been betrayed into for many months.

"It is not a very nice name," said James, a little plaintively. I wish I had a name like yours Miss — Traffio."

"Why, I think yours is quite as nice," she answered gravely. "It makes me think of the man who wrote the fairy stories."

James Andersen frowned, "I don't like fairy stories," he said almost gruffly. "They tease and fret me. I like Thomas Hardy's books. Do you know Thomas Hardy?" Lacrima made a little involuntary gesture of depreciation. As a matter of fact her reading, until very lately, had been as conventual as that of a young nun. Vennie Seldom or the demure Reynolds girl could not have been more innocent of the darker side of literature. Hardy's books she had seen in the hands of Gladys, and the association repelled her. Pathetically anxious to brush away this little cloud, she began hurriedly talking to her new friend of Italy; of its cities, its sea-coasts, its monasteries, its churches. James Andersen listened with reverential attention, every now and then asking a question which showed how deeply his mother's love of the classical country had sunk into his nature.

By this time they had wandered along the road as far as a little stone bridge with low parapets which crosses there a muddy Somersetshire stream. From this point the road rises quite steeply to the beginning of the vicarage garden. Leaning against the parapet of the little bridge, and looking back, they saw to their surprise that Gladys and Luke had not only not followed them but had completely disappeared.

The last of the unskilled workmen from the sheds, trailing up the road together laughing and chatting, turned when they passed, and gazed back, as our two companions were doing, at the work-shops they had left, acknowledging Lacrima's gentle "good-

night" with a rather shifty salutation. — This girl was after all only a dependent like themselves. — They had hardly gone many steps before they burst into a loud rough guffaw of rustic impertinence.

Lacrima struck the ground nervously with her parasol. "What has happened?" she asked; "where has Gladys gone?"

James Andersen shrugged his shoulders, "I expect they have wandered into the shed," he rejoined, "to look at my brother's work there."

She glanced nervously up and down the road; gave a quaint little sigh and made an expressive gesture with her hands as if disclaiming all responsibility for her cousin's doings. Then, quite suddenly, she smiled at Andersen with a delicious childish smile that transfigured her face.

"Well, I am glad I am not left alone at any rate," she said.

"I have a presentiment," the stone-cutter answered, "that this is not the last time you will be thrown upon my poor company."

The girl blushed, and smiled confidingly. Her manner was the manner of a child, who has at last found a safe protector. Then all of a sudden she became very grave. "I hope," she said, "that you are one of the people who are kind to Mr. Quincunx. He is a *great* friend of mine."

Never had the melancholy intimation, that one could not hope to hold anything but the second place in a woman's heart, been more tenderly or more directly conveyed!

James Andersen bowed his head.

"Mr. Quincunx has always been very kind to *me*,"

he said, "and certainly, after what you say, I shall do all in my power to help him. But I can do very little. I believe Mrs. Seldom understands him better than anyone else."

He had hardly finished speaking when the figures of two men made themselves visible opposite the back entrance of the vicarage. They were leisurely strolling down the road, and every now and then they would pause, as if the interest of their conversation was more than the interest of the way.

"Why! There *is* Mr. Quincunx," cried the Italian; and she made an instinctive movement as if to put a little further space between herself and her companion. "Who is that person with him?" she added.

"It looks like George Wone," answered the stone-cutter. "Yes, it is George; and he is talking as usual at the top of his voice. You'd suppose he wanted to be heard by all Nevilton."

Lacrima hesitated and looked very embarrassed. She evidently did not know whether to advance in the direction of the newcomers or to remain where she was. Andersen came to her rescue.

"Perhaps," said he, "it would be better if I went back and told Miss Romer you are waiting for her." Lacrima gave him a quick glance of responsive gratitude.

"O, that would be really kind of you, Mr. Andersen," she said.

The moment he had gone, however, she felt annoyed that she had let him go. It looked so odd, she thought, his leaving her so suddenly, directly Maurice came on the scene. Besides, what would Gladys say at this interruption of her pleasure? She would

suppose she had done it out of pure spitefulness! The moments seemed very long to her as she waited at the little bridge, tracing indecipherable hieroglyphics in the dust with the end of her parasol. She kept her eyes steadily fixed on the tall retreating figure of the stone-cutter as he slouched with his long shambling stride towards the work-shop. The two men were not, however, really long in approaching. Maurice had seen her from the beginning, and his replies to Mr. Wone's oratory had grown proportionally brief.

When they reached her, the girl shook hands with Maurice and bowed rather coldly to Mr. Wone. That gentleman was not however in the least quelled or suppressed. It was one of his most marked characteristics to have absolutely no consciousness of season or situation. When less clever people would have wished the earth to swallow them up, Mr. Wone remained imperviously self-satisfied. Having exchanged greetings, Lacrima hastened to explain that she was waiting at this spot till Miss Romer should rejoin her. "Luke Andersen is showing her his work," she said, "and James has gone to tell her I am waiting."

Mr. Wone became voluble at this. "It is a shame to keep a young lady like yourself waiting in the middle of the road." He turned to Mr. Quincunx. "We must not say all we think, must we? But begging this young lady's pardon, it is just like the family. No consideration! No consideration for anyone! It is the same with his treatment of the poor. I am talking of Mr. Romer, you know, Miss. I would say the same thing to his face. Why is it

that hard-working clever fellows, like these Andersens for instance, should do all the labour, and he get all the profits? It isn't fair. It's unjust. It's an insult to God's beautiful earth, which is free to all." He paused to take breath, and looked to Maurice for confirmation of his words.

"You are quite right, Wone; you are quite right," muttered the recluse in his beard, furtively glancing at Lacrima.

Mr. Wone continued his discourse, making large and eloquent allusion to the general relations in England between employer and employed, and implying plainly enough his full knowledge that at least one of his hearers belonged to the latter class. His air, as he spoke, betrayed a certain disordered fanaticism, quite genuine and deeply felt, but queerly mingled with an indescribable element of complacent self-conceit. Lacrima, in spite of considerable sympathy with much that he said, felt that there was, in the man himself, something so slipshod, so limp, so vague, and so patently vulgar, that both her respect for his sincerity and her interest in his opinions were reduced to nothing. Not only was he narrow-minded and ignorant; but there was also about him, in spite of the aggressive violence of his expressions, an odd sort of deprecatory, apologetic air, as though he were perpetually endeavouring to cajole his audience, by tacit references to his deferential respect for them. There was indeed more than a little in him of the sleek unction of the nonconformist preacher; and one could well understand how he might combine, precisely as Mr. Lickwit suspected, the divergent functions of the politician and the evangelist.

"I tell you," he was saying, "the country will not long put up with this sort of thing. There is a movement, a tendency, a volcanic upheaval, a stirring of waters, which these plutocrats do not realize. There is a surging up from the depths of — of —" He paused for a word.

"Of mud," murmured Mr. Quincunx.

"—Of righteous revolt against these atrocious inequalities! The working people are asleep no longer. They're roused. The movement's begun. The thunder's gathering on the horizon. The armies of the exploited are feeling the impulse of their own strength, of that noble, that splendid anger, which, when it is conceived, will bring forth — will bring forth —"

"Damnation," murmured Mr. Quincunx.

The three figures as they stood, thus consorted, on the little stone bridge, made up a dramatic group. The sinking sun threw their shadows in long wavering lines upon the white road, distorting them to so grotesque a length that they nearly reached the open gates of the station.

Human shadows! What a queer half-mocking commentary they make upon the vanity of our passionate excitements, roused by anything, quieted by nothing, as the world moves round!

Lacrima, in her shadow, was not beautiful at all. She was an elongated wisp of darkness. The beard of Mr. Quincunx looked as if it belonged to a mammoth goat, and the neck of Mr. Wone seemed to support, not a human cranium at all, but a round, wagging mushroom.

The hushed fields on each side of the way began to assume that magical softness which renders them,

at such an hour, insubstantial, unreal, remote, transformed. One felt as though the earth might indeed be worthy of better destinies than those that traced their fantastic trails up and down its peaceful surface. Something deeply withheld, seemed as though it only needed the coming of one god-like spirit to set it free forever, and, with it, all the troubled hearts of men. It was one of those moments which, whether the participants in them recognize them or not, at the actual time, are bound to recur, long afterwards, to their memory.

Lacrima, half-listening to Mr. Wone, kept her head anxiously turned in the direction of the sheds, into one of which she had observed James Andersen enter.

Maurice Quincunx, his mood clogged and clotted by jealousy, watched her with great melancholy grey eyes, while with his nervous fingers he plucked at his beard.

"The time is coming — the time is coming"; cried Mr. Wone, striking with the back of his fist, the parapet against which he leaned, "when this exploitation of the poor by the rich will end once for all!" The warmth of his feeling was so great, that large drops of sweat trickled down his sallow cheeks, and hanging for a moment at the end of his narrow chin, fell into the dust. The man was genuinely moved; though in his watery blue eyes no trace of any fire was visible. He looked, in his emotion, like an hypnotized sick person, talking in the stress of a morbid fever. It was the revolt of one who carried the obsequious slavery of generations in his blood, and could only rebel in galvanized moribund spasms. The fellow was unpleasing, uninspiring: not the

savage leader of a race of stern revolutionary devotees fired by the iron logic of their cause, but the inchoate inarticulate voice of clumsy protest, apologizing and propitiating, even while it protested. The vulgarity and meanness of the candidate's tone made one wonder how such a one as he could ever have been selected by the obscure working of the Spirit of Sacrifice, to undertake this titanic struggle against the Spirit of Power. One turned away instinctively from his febrile rhetoric, to cast involuntary incense at the feet of the masterful enemy he opposed. He had no reticence in his enthusiasm, no reserve, no decency.

"You may perhaps not know," he blundered on; "that the General Election is much nearer than people think. Mr. Romer will find this out; he will find it out; he will find it out! I have good authority for what I say. I speak of what I know, young lady." This was said rather severely, for Lacrima's attention was so obviously wandering. — "Of course you will not breathe a word of this, up there," — he nodded in the direction of the House. "It would not do. But the truth is, he is making a great mistake. I am prepared for this campaign, and he is not. He is even thinking of reducing the men's wages still further. The fool — the fool — the fool!. For he *is* a fool, you know, though he thinks he is so clever."

Even Mr. Wone would scarcely have dared to utter these bold asseverations in the ear of Gladys Romer's cousin, if Maurice's innate indiscretion had not made it the gossip of the village that the Italian was ill-treated "among those people." To the pathetic man's poor vulgar turn of mind there was

something soothing in this confidential abuse of the lord of Nevilton Manor to his own relation. It had a squalid piquancy. It was itself a sort of revenge.

Once more he began his spasmodic enunciation of those sad economic platitudes that are the refuge of the oppressed; but Mr. Quincunx had crossed the road, in the pursuit of a decrepit tiger-moth, and was listening no more. Lacrima's attention was completely withdrawn.

"Well, dear friends," he concluded, "I must really be getting back to my supper. Mrs. Wone will be unbearable if I am late." He hesitated a moment as if wondering whether the occasion called for any further domestic jocosity, to let these high matters lightly down to earth; but he contented himself with shaking hands with Mr. Quincunx and removing his hat to Lacrima.

"Good night, dear friends," he repeated, drifting off, up the road, humming a hymn tune.

"Poor man!" whispered the girl, "he means well."

"He ought to be shot!" was the unexpected response of the hermit of Dead Man's Cottage, as he let the tiger-moth flutter down into the edge of the field. "He is no better than the rest. He is an idiot. He ought to learn Latin."

They moved together towards the station.

"I don't like the way you agree with people to their face," said Lacrima, "and abuse them behind their backs."

"I don't like the way you hang about the roads with handsome stone-cutters," was Mr. Quincunx's surly retort.

Meanwhile, a quite interesting little drama had

been unfolding itself in the neighbourhood of the half-carved block of sandstone. Instructed, by a swift flash of perception, into what the situation implied, Luke's quick magnetic fingers soon drew from his companion's an electric responsive clasp, as they leant together over the mouldings. The warmth and pliable softness of the girl's body seemed to challenge the man with intimations of how quickly it would yield. He pointed to the shed-door, wide open behind them.

"I will show you my work, in there, in a moment," he murmured, "as soon as they have gone."

Her breast rose and fell under the increased excitement of her breathing. Violent quivers ran up and down her frame and communicated themselves to him. Their hearts beat fiercely in reciprocal agitation. Luke's voice, as he continued his conventional summary of the quality and destination of the stone, shook a little, and sounded queer and detached.

"It is for Shaftesbury church," he said, "for the base of the column that supports the arch. This particular moulding is one which my father designed. You must remember that upon it will rest a great deal of the weight of the roof."

His fellow workmen had now collected their tools and were shuffling nervously past them. It required all Gladys' sang-froid to give them the casual nod due from the daughter of the House to those who laboured in its service. As soon as they were well upon their way, with a quick glance at the distant figures of Lacrima and James, Gladys turned rapidly to her companion.

"Show me," she said.

He went before her and stood in the entrance of the work-shop. When she had passed him into its interior, he casually closed behind them one of the rough folding doors. The contrast from the horizontal sun outside, turning the sandstone blocks into ruddy gold, to the shadowy twilight within, was strangely emphatic. He began to speak; saying he hardly knew what — some kind of stammered nonsense about the bases and capitals and carved mouldings that lay around them. But Gladys, true to her feminine prerogative, swept all this aside. With a bold audacity she began at once.

"How nice to be alone and free, for a little while!"

Then, moving still further into the shadow, and standing, as if absorbed in interest, before the rough beginnings of a fluted pillar which reached as high as the roof —

"What kind of top are you going to put on to that thing?"

As she spoke she leant against the pillar with a soft, weary relaxation of her whole form.

"Come near and tell me about it," she whispered, as if her breath caught in her throat.

Luke recognized the tone — the tone that said, so much more distinctly than words, "I am ready. Why are you so slow?" He came behind her, and as gently and lightly as he could, though his arms trembled, let his fingers slide caressingly round her flexible figure. Her breath came in quick gasps, and one hot small hand met his own and pressed it against her side. Encouraged by this response, he boldly drew her towards him. She struggled a little; a shy girlish struggle, more than half conventional — and

then, sliding round in his arms with a quick feline movement, she abandoned herself to her craving, and embraced him shamelessly and passionately. When at last in sheer weariness her arms relaxed and she sank down, with her hands pressed to her burning cheeks, upon an unfinished font, Luke Andersen thought that never to his dying day would he forget the serpentine clinging of that supple form and the pressure of those insatiable lips. He turned, a little foolishly, towards the door and kicked with his foot a fragment of a carved reredos. Then he went back to her and half-playfully, half-amorously, tried to remove her hands from her face.

"Don't touch me! I hate you!" she said.

"Please," he whispered, "please don't be unkind now. I shall never, never forget how sweet you've been."

"Tell me more about this work of yours," she suddenly remarked, in a completely changed voice, rising to her feet. "I have always understood that you were one of our best workmen. I shall tell my father how highly I think of what you're doing — you and your brother. I am sure he will be glad to know what artists he has among his men."

She gave her head a proud little toss and raised negligent deliberate hands to her disarranged fair hair, smoothing it down and readjusting her wide-brimmed hat. She had become the grand lady again and Luke had become the ordinary young stone-mason. Superficially, and with a charming grace, he adapted himself to this change, continuing his conventional remarks about fonts, pillars, crosses, and capitals; and calling her "Miss" or "Miss Gladys," with scrupulous discretion. But in his heart, all the

while, he was registering a deep and vindictive vow — a vow that, at whatever risk and at whatever cost, he would make this fair young despot suffer for her caprice. Gladys had indeed, quite unwittingly, entered into a struggle with a nature as remorseless and unscrupulous as her own. She had dreamed, in her imperial way, of using this boy for her amusement, and then throwing him aside. She did not for a moment intend to get entangled in any sentimental relations with him. A passing "amour," leading to nothing, and in no way committing her, was what she had instinctively counted on. For the rest, in snatching fiercely at any pleasure her fervent senses craved, she was as conscienceless and antinomian, as a young tiger out of the jungle. Nor had she the remotest sense of danger in this exciting sport. Corrupt and insensitive as any amorous courtezan of a pagan age, she trusted to her freedom from innocence to assure her of freedom from disaster. Vaguely enough in her own mind she had assumed, as these masterful "blond beasts" are inclined to assume, that in pouncing on this new prey she was only dealing once more with that malleable and timorous humanity she had found so easy to mould to her purpose in other quarters. She reckoned, with a pathetic simplicity, that Luke would be clay in her hands. As a matter of fact this spoiled child of the wealth produced by the Leonian stone had audaciously flung down her challenge to one who had as much in him as herself of that stone's tenacity and imperviousness. The daughter of sandstone met the carver of sandstone; and none, who knew the two, would have dared to predict the issue of such an encounter.

The young man was still urbanely and discreetly discoursing to his lady-visitor upon the contents of the work-shop, when the tall figure of James Andersen darkened the door.

"Excuse me, Miss," he said to Gladys, "but Miss Lacrima asked me to tell you that she was waiting for you on the bridge."

"Thank you, James," answered the girl simply, "I will come. I am afraid my interest in all the things your brother has been so kindly showing me has made you both late. I am sorry." Here she actually went so far as to fumble in her skirt for her purse. After an awkward pause, during which the two men waited at either side of the door, she found what she sought, and tripping lightly by, turned as she passed Luke and placed in his hand, the hand that so recently had been clasped about her person, the insolent recompense of a piece of silver. Bidding them both good-night, she hurried away to rejoin Lacrima, who, having by this time got rid of Mr. Quincunx, moved down the road to meet her.

Luke closed and locked the door of the shed without a word. Then to the astonishment of James Andersen he proceeded to dance a kind of grotesque war-dance, ending it with a suppressed half-mocking howl, as he leant exhausted against the wall of the building.

"I've got her, I've got her, I've got her!" he repeated. "James, my darling Daddy James, I've got this girl in the palm of my hand!" He humorously proceeded to toss the coin she had given him high in the air. "Heads or tails?" he cried, as the thing fell

among the weeds. "Heads! It's heads, my boy! That means that Miss Gladys Romer will be sorry she ever stepped inside this work-shop of ours. Come, let's wash and eat, my brother; for the gods have been good to us today."

CHAPTER V

FRANCIS TAXATER

THE day following the one whose persuasive influence we have just recorded was not less auspicious. The weather seemed to have effected a transference of its accustomed quality, bringing to the banks of the Yeo and the Parret the atmospheric conditions belonging to those of the Loire or the Arno.

Having finished her tea Valentia Seldom was strolling meditatively up and down the vicarage terrace, alternately stopping to pick off the petals of a dead flower, or to gaze, with a little gloomy frown, upon the grass of the orchard.

Her slender upright figure, in her black silk dress, made a fine contrast to the rich green foliage about her, set on one side with ruby-coloured roses and on the other with yellow buttercups. But the old lady was in no peaceful frame of mind. Every now and then she tapped the gravel impatiently with her ebony stick; and the hand that toyed with the trinkets at her side mechanically closed and unclosed its fingers under the wrist-band of Mechlin lace. It was with something of an irritable start, that she turned round to greet Francis Taxater, as led by the little servant he presented himself to her attention. He moved to greet her with his usual imperturbable gravity, walking sedately along the edge of the flowery

border; with one shoulder a little higher than the other and his eyes on the ground.

His formidable prelatical chin seemed more than ever firmly set that afternoon, and his grey waistcoat, under his shabby black coat, was tightly drawn across his emphatic stomach. His coal-black eyes, darkened yet further by the shadow of his hat, glanced furtively to right and left of him as he advanced. In the manner peculiar to persons disciplined by Catholic self-control, his head never followed, by the least movement, the shrewd explorations of these diplomatic eyes.

One would have taken him for a French bishop, of aristocratic race, masquerading, for purposes of discretion, in the dress of a secular scholar.

Everything about Francis Taxater, from the noble intellectual contours of his forehead, down to his small satyr-like feet, smacked of the courtier and the priest; of the learned student, and the urbane frequenter of sacred conclaves. His small white hand, plump and exquisitely shaped, rested heavily on his cane. He carried with him in every movement and gesture that curious air of dramatic weight and importance which men of diplomatic experience are alone able to use without letting it degenerate into mannerism. It was obvious that he, at any rate, according to Mr. Quincunx's favourite discrimination, "knew Latin." He seemed to have slid, as it were, into this commercial modern world, from among the contemporaries of Bossuet. One felt that his authors were not Ibsen or Tolstoy, but Horace and Cicero.

One felt also, however, that in sheer psychological astuteness not even Mr. Romer himself would be a

match for him. Between those two, the man of modern wisdom and the man of ancient wisdom, any struggle that might chance to occur would be a singularly curious one. If Mr. Taxater really was "on the side of the angels," he was certainly there with the full weight of organized hierarchies. If he did exert his strength upon the side of "meekness," it would be a strength of no feverish, spasmodic eruption.

If Satan threw a Borgia in Mr. Taxater's path, that Borgia, it appeared, would find his Machiavel.

"Yes, it is a lovely day again," said the old lady, leading her visitor to a seat and placing herself by his side. "But what is our naughty Monsignor doing, playing truant from his consistory? I thought you would be in London this week — at the Eucharist Conference your people are holding? Is it to the loveliness of the weather that we owe this pleasant surprise?"

One almost expected — so formal and old-fashioned were the two interlocutors — that Mr. Taxater would have replied, in the tone of Ivanhoe or the Talisman, "A truce to such jesting, Madam!" No doubt if he had, the lady would hardly have discerned any anachronism. As a matter of fact he did not answer her question at all, but substituted one of his own.

"I met Vennie in the village," he said. "Do you think she is happier now, in her new English circle?"

"Ah! my friend," cried the old lady, in a nervous voice, "it is of Vennie that I have been thinking all this afternoon. No, I cannot say I think she is happier. I wonder if it is one thing; and then I wonder if it is another. I cannot get to the bottom of it and it worries me."

"I expect it is her nerves," said the diplomatist. "Though the sun is so warm, there has been a constant east wind lately; and, as you know, I put down most of our agitations to the presence of east wind."

"It will not do, Mr. Taxater; it will not do! It may be the east wind with you and me. It is not the east wind with Vennie. Something is troubling her. I wish I could discern what it is?"

"She isn't by any chance being vexed by some theological dispute with the Vicar, is she? I know how seriously she takes all his views. And his views are, if I may say so, decidedly confusing. Don't misunderstand me, dear lady. I respect Mr. Clavering and admire him. I like the shape of his head; especially when he wears his beretta. But I cannot feel much confidence in his wisdom in dealing with a sensitive child like your daughter. He is too impulsive. He is too dogmatic. He lives too entirely in the world of doctrinal controversy. It is dangerous"; here Mr. Taxater luxuriously stretched out his legs and lit a cigarette; "it is dangerous to live only for theology. We have to learn to live for Religion; and that is a much more elaborate affair. *That* extends very far, Mrs. Seldom."

The old lady let her stick slide to the ground and clasped her hands together. "I want to ask you one thing, Mr. Taxater. And I implore you to be quite direct with me. You do not think, do you, that my girl is tending towards *your* church — towards Rome? I confess it would be a heavy blow to me, one of the heaviest I have ever had, if anything of that kind happened. I know you are tolerant enough to let me speak like this without scruple. I like *you*, my dear friend — "

Here a soft flush spread over Valentia's ivory-coloured cheeks and she made a little movement as if to put her hand on her companion's arm. "I like you yourself, and have the utmost confidence in you. But Oh, it would be a terrible shock to me if Vennie became a Roman Catholic. She would enter a convent; I *know* she would enter a convent and that would be more than I could bear." The accumulated distress of many years was in the old lady's voice and tears stood in her eyes. "I know it is silly," she went on as Mr. Taxater steadily regarded the landscape. "But I cannot help it. I do so hope — Oh, I can't tell you how much — that Vennie will marry and have children. It is the secret burden of my life, the thought that, with this frail little thing, our ancient race should disappear. I feel it my deepest duty — my duty to the Past and my duty to the Future — to arrange a happy marriage for her. If only that could be achieved, I should be able to die content."

"You have no evidence, no authority for thinking," said Mr. Taxater gravely, "that she is meditating any approach to *my* church, as you call it, have you?"

"Oh no!" cried the old lady, "quite the contrary. She seems absorbed in the services here. She works with Mr. Clavering, she discusses everything with Mr. Clavering, she helps Mr. Clavering with the poor. I believe" — here Valentia lowered her voice; "I believe she confesses to Mr. Clavering."

Francis Taxater smiled — the smile of the heir of Christendom's classic faith at these pathetic fumblings of heresy — and carefully knocked the ashes from his cigarette against the handle of his cane.

"You don't think, dear lady," he said, "that by

any chance — girls are curiously subtle in these little things — she is 'in love,' as they call it, with our nice handsome Vicar?"

Valentia gave an involuntary little start. In her heart there rose up the shadow of a shadow of questioning, whether in this last remark the great secular diplomatist had not lapsed into something approaching a "faux pas."

"Certainly not," she answered. "Vennie is not a girl to mix up her religion with things of that sort."

Francis Taxater permitted the flicker of a smile to cross his face. He slightly protruded his lower lip which gave his countenance a rather sinister expression. His look said, more clearly than words, that in his opinion there was no woman on earth who did not "mix up these things" with her religion.

"I have not yet made my request to you," continued the old lady, with a certain nervous hesitation. "I am so afraid lest you should think it an evidence of a lack of confidence. It isn't so! It really isn't so. I only do it to relieve my mind; — to make my food taste better, if you understand? — and to stop this throbbing in my head." She paused for a moment, and picking up her stick, prodded the gravel with it, with lowered face. The voices of not less than three wood-pigeons were audible from the apple-orchard. And this soft accompaniment to her words seemed to give her courage. Fate could not, surely, altogether betray her prayers, in a place so brooded over by "the wings of the dove." In the exquisite hush of the afternoon the birds' rich voices seemed to take an almost liturgical tone — as though they were the ministers of a great natural temple.

To make a solemn request of a dear friend under such conditions was almost as though one were exacting a sacred vow under the very shadow of the altar.

So at least Valentia felt, as she uttered her serious petition; though it may well be that Mr. Taxater, skilled in the mental discipline of Saint Ignatius, knew better how to keep the distracting influences of mere "Nature," in their proper secondary place.

"I want you faithfully to promise me," she said, "that you will in no way — in no way at all — use your influence over Vennie to draw her from her English faith." The old lady's voice became quite husky in her emotion. "It would be dreadful to me to think, — I could not bear to think" — she went on, "that you should in the smallest degree use your great powers of mind to disturb the child's present attitude. If she is not happy, it is not—Oh, I assure you, it is not—in any sense due to her being dissatisfied with her religion. It must be something quite different. What it is, I cannot guess; but it must be something quite different from *that*. Well, dear friend," and she did now, quite definitely, lay her hand on his arm, "will you promise this for me? You will? I know you will."

Francis Taxater rose from his seat and stood over her very gravely, leaning upon his cane.

"You have done well to tell me this, Mrs. Seldom," he said. "Most certainly I shall make no attempt to influence Vennie. It would be indeed contrary to all that I regard as wise and suitable in the relations between us. I never convert people. I believe you will find that very few of those who are born Catholics ever interfere in that way. It is the impetuosity

of new-comers into the church that gives us this bad name. They often carry into their new faith the turbulent theological zeal which distinguished them in their old one. I, at any rate, am not like that. I leave people alone. I prefer to watch them develop on their own lines. The last thing I should wish to do would be to meddle with Vennie's religious taste. It would be a blunder as well as an impertinence. Vennie would be the first to resist any such proceeding. It would destroy her respect for me. It might even destroy her affection for me. It certainly would not move her. Indeed, dear lady, if I wished to plant the child's soul irrevocably in the soil prepared by our good vicar I could not do anything more effective than try to persuade her of its deficiencies. No, no! You may rely upon me to stand completely aside in this matter. If Vennie *were* led to join us — which for your sake, dear Mrs. Seldom, I hope will never happen,— you may accept my word of honour it will be from her own spontaneous impulse. I shall make not the least movement in the direction you fear. *That* I can devoutly promise."

He turned away his head and regarded with calm, placid detachment the rich, shadowy orchard and the golden buttercups.

The contours of his profile were so noble, and the pose of his head so majestic, that the agitated mother was soothed and awed into complete confidence.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed. "*That* fear, at any rate, has passed. I shall be grateful to you forever, dear friend, for what you have just now said. It is a direct answer to my prayers."

"May I, in my turn," said Mr. Taxater, resuming his seat by her side, "ask you a bold and uncalled for question? What would you do, if in the changes and chances of this life, Vennie *did* come to regard Mr. Clavering with favour? Would you for a moment consider their union as a possible one?"

Valentia looked not a little embarrassed. Once more, in her heart, she accused the urbane scholar of a lack of delicacy and discretion. These little questions are not the ones to put to a perturbed mother.

However, she answered him plainly enough. "I should not like it, I confess. It would disappoint me. I am not ambitious, but sometimes I catch myself desiring, for my beloved child, a marriage that would give her the position she deserves, the position — pardon a woman's weakness, sir! — that her ancestors held in this place. But then, again, I am only anxious for her happiness. No, Mr. Taxater. If such a thing did occur I should not oppose it, Mr. Clavering is a gentleman, though a poor one and, in a sense, an eccentric one. But I have no prejudice against the marriage of our clergy. In fact I think they ought to marry. It is so suitable, you know, to have a sensible woman endowed with such opportunities for making her influence felt. I would not wish Vennie to marry beneath her, but sooner than not see her married — well! — That is the kind of feeling I have about it, Mr. Taxater."

"Thank you — thank you. I fear my question was impertinent; but in return for the solemn oath you exacted from me, I think I deserved some reward, don't you? But seriously, Mrs. Seldom, I

do not think that any of these less desirable fates will befall our dear child. I think she will marry a pillar of the aristocracy, and remain herself a pillar of the Anglican Church! I trust she will not, whatever happens, lose her regard for her old Catholic friend."

He rose as he spoke and held out his hand. Mrs. Seldom took it in her own and held it for a moment with some emotion. Had he been a real Monsignor, he could not have looked more calm, more tolerant, more kind, than he looked at that moment. He wore the expression that high ecclesiastics must come to wear, when devoted but somewhat troublesome daughters of the church press close to kiss the amethystine ring.

A few minutes later he was passing out of the vicarage gate. The new brood of warblers that flitted about the tall bushes at that spot heard — with perfect unconcern — a mysterious Latin quotation issue from that restrained mouth. They could hardly be blamed for not understanding, even though they had migrated to these fields of heresy from more classic places, that the plain English interpretation of the dark saying was that all things are lawful to him whose motive is the "Potestas Civitatis Dei!"

He crossed the dusty road and was proceeding towards his own house, which was hardly more than a hundred yards away, when he saw through a wide gap in the hedge a pleasant and familiar sight. It was a hay-field, in the final stage of its "making," surrendering to a great loose stack, built up beneath enormous elm-trees, the last windrows of its sweet-scented harvest.

Pausing for a moment to observe more closely this pleasant scene — for hay-making in Dorsal Field amounted to a village ritual — Mr. Taxater became aware that among the figures scattered in groups about the meadow were the very two whose relation to one another he had just been discussing. Vennie and the young clergyman were engaged in an animated conversation with three of the farm-boys.

Mr. Taxater at once climbed through the gap, and crossing the field approached the group unobserved. It was not till he was quite close that Vennie caught sight of him. Her pale, pinched little face, under its large hat, flushed slightly as she held out her hand; but her great steady grey eyes were full of friendly welcome.

Mr. Clavering too was effusive and demonstrative in his greeting. They chatted a little of indifferent matters, and the theologian was introduced to the shy farm-boys, who stared at him in rustic wonder.

Then Hugh Clavering said, "If you'll pardon me for a moment, I think I ought to go across and speak to John Goring," and he indicated the farmer's figure bending over a new gleaning-machine, at the opposite end of the field. "Don't go away, please, Mr. Taxater, till I come back. You will keep him, won't you, Miss Seldom?"

He strode off; and the boys drifted away after him, leaving Mr. Taxater and the girl together, under the unfinished hay-stack. "I was so much wanting to speak to you," began Vennie at once. "I very nearly ran in to the Gables; but I saw Mrs. Watnot over the wall, and she told me you were out. I am in serious need of advice upon a thing

that is troubling me, and you are the only person who can really help."

The expression of Mr. Taxater's face at that moment was so sympathetic, and yet so grave, that one would hardly have been surprised to hear him utter the conventional formula of a priest awaiting confession. Though unuttered, the sacred formula must have been telepathically communicated, for Vennie continued without a pause, holding her hands behind her back, and looking on the ground. "Ever since our last serious conversation — do you remember? — after Easter, I have been thinking so much about that phrase of yours, referring to the Pope, as the eternal living defender of the idea of Love as the secret of the universe. Mr. Clavering talks to me about love — you know what I mean," she smiled and blushed prettily, with a quick lifting of her head, "but he never gives me the feeling of something real and actual which we can approach on earth — something personal, I mean. And I have been feeling so much lately that this is what I want. Mr. Clavering is very gentle with me when I try to explain my difficulties to him; but I don't think he really understands. The way he talks is beautiful and inspiring — but it somehow sounds like poetry. It does not give me anything to lay hands on." And she looked into Mr. Taxater's face with a pathetic wide-eyed appeal, as if he were able to call down angels from heaven.

"Dear child," said the diplomatist, "I know only too well what you mean. Yes, that is the unfortunate and necessary limitation of a heretical church. It can only offer mystic and poetic consolations. It

has lost touch with the one true Vine, and consequently the full stream of life-giving sap cannot flow through its veins."

"But I have felt so strengthened," said Vennie mournfully, "by the sacrament in our Church; so strengthened and inspired! It seems dreadful that it should all be a sort of mockery."

"Do not speak like that, dear child," said Mr. Taxater. "God is good; and in his knowledge of our weakness he permits us to taste of his mystery even in forbidden cups. The motive in your heart, the faith in your soul, have been pure; and God has given to them some measure, though but an imperfect one, of what he will grant to your complete obedience."

Vennie bent down and picking up a swathe of sweet-scented hay twisted it thoughtfully in her fingers. "God has indeed been working miracles on your behalf," continued Mr. Taxater. "It must have been your guardian angel that led me to speak to you as I did at that time. For in future, I regret to say, I shall be less free. But the good work has been done. The seed has been sown. What follows must be at your own initiative."

Vennie looked at him, puzzled, and rather alarmed. "Why do you say you will be less free? Are we going to have no more lovely conversations at the bottom of our orchard? Are you going to be too busy to see me at all?"

Mr. Taxater smiled. "Oh no, it isn't as bad as that," he said. "It is only that I have just faithfully promised your mother not to convert you to Catholicism."

"Mother had no right to make you give any such promise," cried the girl indignantly.

"No," responded the diplomatist, "she had no such right. No one has a right to demand promises of that kind. It is one of the worst and subtlest forms of persecution."

"But you did not promise? You surely did not promise?"

"There was no escaping it," replied Mr. Taxater. "If I had not done so she would have given you no peace, and your future movements would have been mercilessly watched. However," he went on, smilingly, "a promise exacted under that kind of compulsion must be interpreted in a very large and liberal way. Relatively I must avoid discussing these things with you. In a higher and more absolute sense we will combine our thoughts about them, day and night, until we worship at the same altar."

Vennie was silent. The noble and exalted sophistry of the subtle scholar puzzled and bewildered her. "But I have no idea of what to do next," she protested. "I know no Catholics but you. I should feel very nervous on going to the priest in Yeoborough. Besides, I don't at all like the look of him. And the people here say he is often drunk. You wouldn't send me to a man like that, would you? Oh, I feel so angry with mother! She had no right to go to you behind my back."

Francis Taxater laid his hand gently on the girl's shoulder. "There is no reason for haste," he said. "There is no cause to agitate yourself. Just remain quietly as you are. Say nothing to your mother. It would only cause her unnecessary distress. I

never promised not to lend you books. All my shelves are at your service. Read, my dear Vennie, read and think. My books will supply the place of my words. Indeed, they will serve the purpose much better. In this way we shall at once be obeying your earthly mother, and not disobeying your heavenly mother, who is now — Ave Maria gratiae plena! — drawing you so strongly towards her."

"Shall I say anything to Mr. Clavering?"

"Not a word! not a word! And enter as little as possible into argument with him. If he fancies, from your silence, that he has quelled your doubts, let him fancy so. The mistake will be due to his own pride and not to any deception. It is wrong to lie — but we are not called upon to dispel illusions arising from the self-conceit of others."

"But you — will — think — of me?" pleaded little Vennie. "I may know that you have not deserted me? That you are always ready — always there?"

Mr. Taxater smiled benignly. "Of course I shall be ready, dear child. And you must be ready. That is why I only ask you to read and think. God will answer your prayers if you show patience. He has taught his church never to clamour for hurried conversions. But to wait, with all her reservoirs of mysteries, till they come to her of their own accord. You will come, Vennie, you will come! But it will be in God's hour and not in ours."

Vennie Seldom thanked him with a timid glance of infinite gratitude and confidence. A soft luminous happiness suffused her being, into which the scents and sounds of that felicitous hour poured their offerings of subtle contentment. In after years, in strange

and remote places, she never forgot the high thrilling exultation, calm, yet passionate as an indrawn wave, of that unrecurring moment.

The security that filled her passed, indeed, only too quickly away. Her face clouded and a little anxious frown puckered her narrow white forehead.

"There is something else I wanted to ask you," she said hurriedly, "and I must say it quickly because I am afraid of Mr. Clavering coming back. It has to do with Mr. Clavering. I do not think you realize what influence you have over people, what powerful influence! Mr. Clavering adores you. He would do anything for you. He respects you as a thinker. He venerates you as a good man. Now, Mr. Taxater, please, please, use your influence with him to save him — to save him —" She stopped abruptly, and a flood of colour rushed to her cheeks.

"To save him from what, dear child? I am afraid there is no hope of Mr. Clavering coming to our way of thinking."

"It isn't that, Mr. Taxater! Its something else; — something to do with his own happiness, with his own life. Oh, it is so hard for me to tell you!" She clenched her hands tightly together and looked steadily away from him as she spoke. "It is that that dreadful Gladys Romer has been plaguing him so — tempting him to flirt with her, to be silly about her, and all that sort of thing. He does not really like her at all. That I *know*. But he is passionate and excitable, and easily led away by a girl like that. Oh, it all sounds so absurd, as I say it," cried poor Vennie, with cheeks that were by this time flaming, "but it's much, much more serious than it sounds.

You see, I know Mr. Clavering very well. I know how simple and pure-minded he is. And I know how desperately he prays against being led away — like this. Gladys does not care for him really a bit. She only does it to amuse herself; to satisfy her wicked, wicked nature! She would like to lead him as far as she possibly could, and then to turn upon him and make him thoroughly miserable. She is the kind of girl—Oh what am I saying to you, Mr. Taxater?—that men always are attracted by. Some men I believe would even call her beautiful. I don't think she's that at all. I think she is gross, fleshly, and horrid! But I know what a danger she is to Mr. Clavering. I know the dreadful struggle that goes on in his mind; and the horrible temptation she is to him. I know that after seeing her he always suffers the most cruel remorse. Now, Mr. Taxater, use your influence to strengthen him against this girl's treachery. She only means him harm, I know she does! And if a person like you, whom he loves and admires so much, talked to him seriously about it, it would be such a help to him. He is so young. He is a mere boy, and absolutely ignorant of the world. He does not even realize that the village has already begun its horrid gossip about them. Do — do, do something, Mr. Taxater. It is like that young Parsifal, in the play, being tempted by the enchantress."

"But how do they meet?" asked the diplomatist, with unchanged gravity. "I do not see how they are ever alone together."

"She has arranged it. She is so clever; the bad, bad girl! She goes to him for confirmation lessons.

He teaches her in his study twice a week — separately from the others."

"But her father is a Unitarian."

"That does not interfere. She does what she likes with Mr. Romer. Her game now is to want to be baptized into our church. She is going to be baptized first, and then confirmed."

"And the preparation for baptism is as dangerous as the preparation for confirmation." remarked the scholar; straightening the muscles of his mouth, after the discipline of St. Ignatius.

"The whole thing is horrible — dreadful! It frets me every hour of the day. He is so good and so innocent. He has no idea where she is leading him."

"But I cannot prevent her wanting to be baptized," said Mr. Taxater.

"You can talk to him," answered Vennie, with intense conviction. "You can talk to him and he will listen to you. You can tell him the danger he is in of being made miserable for life." She drew her breath deeply. "Oh the remorse he will feel; the horrible, horrible remorse!"

Mr. Taxater glanced across the hay-field. The sun, a red globe of fire, was resting on the extreme edge of Leo's Hill, and seemed like a great blood-shot eye regarding them with lurid interest. Long cool shadows, thrown across the field by the elms in the hedge and by the stack beside them, melted magically into one another, and made the hillocks of still ungathered grass soft and intangible as fairy graves.

"I will do my best," said the scholar. "I will do my best." And indicating to Vennie, who was absorbed in her nervous gratitude, the near approach

of the object of their saintly conspiracy, he led her forward to meet the young clergyman with an appropriate air of friendly and casual nonchalance.

"I am sorry to have to say it," was Mr. Clavering's greeting, "but that farmer-fellow is the only person in my parish for whom I have a complete detestation. I wish to goodness Mr. Romer had never brought him into the place!"

"I don't like the look of his back, I must say," answered the theologian, following with his eyes the retreating figure of Mr. John Goring.

"He is," said the young priest, "without exception the most repulsive human being I have ever met in my life. Our worthy Romer is an angel of light compared with him."

With Mr. Goring still as their topic, they strolled amicably together towards the same gap in the hedge, through which the apologist of the papacy had emerged an hour before. There they separated, Vennie returning to the vicarage, and the young clergyman carrying off Mr. Taxater to supper with him in his house by the church.

Clavering's establishment consisted of a middle-aged woman of inordinate volubility, and the woman's daughter, a girl of twelve.

The supper offered by the priest to his guest was "light and choice" — nor did it lack its mellow accompaniment of carefully selected, if not "Attic," wine. Of this wine Mr. Taxater did not hesitate to partake freely, sitting, when the meal was over, opposite his host at the open window, through which the pleasant murmurs of the evening, and the voices of the village-street, soothingly and harmoniously floated.

The famous theologian was in an excellent temper. Rich recondite jests pursued one another from his smiling lips, and his white hands folded themselves complacently above the cross on his watch-chain.

Lottie Fringe, the child of Clavering's servant, tripped sportively in and out of the room, encouraged in her girlish coquetries by the amiable scholar. She was not yet too old to be the kittenish plaything of the lighter moments of a wise and scholarly man, and it was pleasant to watch the zest with which the vicar's visitor entered into her sportive audacities. Mr. Taxater made her fill and refill his glass, and taking her playfully on his knee, kissed her and fondled her many times. It was the vicar himself, who finally, a little embarrassed by these levities, sent the girl off to the kitchen, apologizing to his guest for the freedom she displayed.

"Do not apologize, dear Mr. Clavering," said the theologian. "I love all children, especially when they are girls. There is something about the kisses of a young girl — at once amorous and innocent — which reconciles one to the universe, and keeps death at a distance. Could one for a moment think of death, when holding a young thing, so full of life and beauty, on one's knee?"

The young priest's face clouded. "To be quite honest with you, Mr. Taxater," he murmured, in a troubled voice, "I cannot say that I altogether agree. We are both unconventional people, so I may speak freely. I do not think that one does a child any good by encouraging her to be playful and forward, in that particular way. You live with your books; but I live with my people, and I have

known so many sad cases of girls being completely ruined by getting a premature taste for coquetry of that kind."

"I am afraid, my friend," answered Mr. Taxater, "that the worst of all heresies is lodged deep in your heart."

"Heresies? God knows," sighed the priest, "I have enough evil in my heart — but heresies? I am at a loss to catch your meaning."

In the absence of his playful Clerica — to use the Pantagruelian allusion — the great Homenas of Nevilton was compelled to fill his "tall-boy of extravagant wine" with his own hand. He did so, and continued his explanation.

"By the worst of all heresies I mean the dangerous Puritan idea that pleasure itself is evil and a thing detestable to God. The Catholic doctrine, as I understand it, is that all these things are entirely relative to the persons concerned. Pleasure in itself is, in the Aristotelian sense, a supreme good. Everyone has a right to it. Everyone must have it. The whole thing is a matter of proportion and expediency. If an innocent playful game, of the kind you have just witnessed, was likely in this definite particular case to lead to harm, then you would be justified in your anxiety. But there must be no laying down of hard general rules. There must be no making a virtue of the mere denying ourselves pleasure."

Mr. Clavering could hardly wait for his guest to finish.

"Then, according to your theory," he exclaimed, "it would be right for you, or whoever you will, — pardon my making the thing so personal — to indulge

in casual levities with any pretty barmaid, as long as you vaguely surmised that she was a sensible girl and would not be harmed?"

"Certainly it would be right," replied the papal apologist, sipping his wine and inhaling the perfume of the garden, "and not only right, but a plain duty. It is our duty, Mr. Clavering, to make the world happier while we live in it; and the way to make girls happier, especially when their occupations are laborious, is to kiss them; to give them innocent and admiring embraces."

"I am afraid you are not quite serious, Mr. Taxater," said the clergyman. "I have an absurd way of being direct and literal in these discussions."

"Certainly, I am serious. Do you not know — young puritan — that some of the noblest spirits in history have not hesitated to increase the pleasure of girls' lives by giving them frequent kisses? In the Greek days he who could give the most charming kiss was awarded a public prize. In the Elizabethan days all the great and heroic souls, whose exquisite wit and passionate imagination put us still to shame, held large and liberal views on this matter. In the eighteenth century the courtly and moral Joseph Addison used never to leave a coffee-house, however humble and poor, without bestowing a friendly embrace upon every woman in it. The religious Doctor Johnson — a man of your own faith — was notoriously in the habit of taking his prettier visitors upon his knee, and tenderly kissing them. It is no doubt due to this fact, that the great lexicographer was so frequently visited; — especially by young Quakers. When we come to our own age, it is well

known that the late Archbishop Taraton, the refuter of Darwin, was never so happy as when romping round the raspberry-canes in his garden with a crowd of playful girls.

"These great and wise men have all recognized the fact that pleasure is not an evil but a good. A good, however, that must be used discreetly and according to the Christian self-control of which God has given his Church the secret. The senses are not under a curse, Mr. Clavering. They are not given us simply to tempt and perplex us. They are given for our wise and moderate enjoyment."

Francis Taxater once more lifted his glass to his lips.

"To the devil with this Protestant Puritanism of yours! It has darkened the sun in heaven. It is the cause of all the squalid vice and gross excesses of our forlorn England. It is the cause of the deplorable perversities that one sees around one. It is the cause of that odious hypocrisy that makes us the laughing-stock of the great civilized nations of France, Italy and Spain." The theologian drew a deep breath, and continued. "I notice, Mr. Clavering, that you have by your side, still unfinished, your second glass of wine. That is a mistake. That is an insult to Providence. Whatever may be your attitude towards these butterfly-wenches, it cannot, as a matter of poetic economy, be right to leave a wine, as delicate, as delicious as this, to spoil in the glass.

"I suppose it has never occurred to you, Mr. Clavering, to go and sit, with the more interesting of your flock, at the Seldom Arms? It never has? So I

imagined from my knowledge of your uncivilized English ways.

"The European café, sir, is the universal school of refined and intellectual pleasure. It was from his seat in a Roman café — a place not unknown to me myself — that the great Gibbon was accustomed to survey the summer moon, rising above the Pantheon.

"It is the same in the matter of wine as in the other matter. It is your hypocritical and puritanical fear of pleasure that leads to the gross imbibing of villainous spirits and the subterranean slavery of prostitution. If you allowed yourselves, freely, naturally, and with Christian moderation, to enjoy the admirable gifts of the supreme giver, there would no longer be any need for this deplorable plunging into insane vice. As it is — in this appalling country of yours — one can understand every form of debauchery."

At this point Mr. Clavering intervened with an eager and passionate question. He had been listening intently to his visitor's words, and his clear-cut, mobile face had changed its expression more than once during this long discourse.

"You do not, then, think," said he, in a tone of something like supplication, "that there is anything wrong in giving ourselves up to the intense emotion which the presence of beauty and charm is able to excite?"

"Wrong?" said Mr. Taxater. "It is wrong to suppress such feelings! It is all a matter of proportion, my good sir, a matter of proportion and common sense. A little psychological insight will soon make us aware whether the emotion you speak of is

likely to prove injurious to the object of our admiration."

"But oneself — what about oneself?" cried the young priest. "Is there not a terrible danger, in all these things, lest one's spiritual ideal should become blurred and blighted?"

To this question Mr. Taxater returned an answer so formidable and final, that the conversation was brought to an abrupt close.

"What," he said, "has God given us the Blessed Sacraments for?"

Hugh Clavering escorted his visitor to the corner of the street and bade him good-night there. As he re-entered his little garden, he turned for a moment to look at the slender tower of St. Catharine's church, rising calm and still into the hot June sky. Between him and it, flitted like the ghost of a dead Thaïs or Phryne, the pallid shadow of an impassioned temptress holding out provocative arms. The form of the figure seemed woven of all the vapours of unbridled poetic fantasy, but the heavy yellow hair which most of all hid the tower from his view was the hair of Gladys Romer.

The apologist of the papacy strolled slowly and meditatively back to his own house with the easy step of one who was in complete harmony both with gods and men. Above him the early stars began, one by one, to shine down upon the earth, but as he glanced up towards them, removing his hat and passing his hand across his forehead, the great diplomatist appeared quite untroubled by the ineffable littleness of all earthly considerations, under the remoteness of those austere watchers.

The barking of dogs, in distant unknown yards, the melancholy cry of new-shorn lambs, somewhere far across the pastures, the soft, low, intermittent breathing, full of whispers and odours, of the whole mysterious night, seemed only to throw Mr. Taxater back more completely and securely upon that firm ecclesiastical tradition which takes the hearts of men in its hands and turns them away from the Outer Darkness.

He let himself quietly into the Gables garden, by the little gate in the wall, and entered his house. He was surprised to find the door unlocked and a light burning in the kitchen. The careful Mrs. Wotnot was accustomed to retire to rest at a much earlier hour. He found the good woman extended at full length upon three hard chairs, her head supported by a bundle of shawls. She was suffering from one of her chronic rheumatic attacks, and was in considerable distress.

To a less equable and humane spirit there might have been something rather irritating than pathetic about this unexpected finale to a harmonious day. But Mr. Taxater's face expressed no sign of any feeling but that of grave and gentle concern.

With some difficulty, for the muscles of her body were twisted by nervous spasms, the theologian supported the old woman up the stairs, to her room under the eaves. Here he laid her upon the bed, and for the rest of the night refused to leave her room, rubbing with his white plump hands her thin old legs, and applying brandy to her lips at the moments when the nervous contractions that assailed her seemed most extreme. The delicate light of dawn

showed its soft bluish pallour at the small casemented window before the old lady fell asleep; but it was not till relieved by a woman who appeared, several hours later, with their morning's milk, that the defender of the Catholic Faith in Nevilton retired to his well-earned repose.

CHAPTER VI

THE PARIAHS

MR. QUINCUNX was digging in his garden. The wind, a little stronger than on the previous days and still blowing from the east, buffeted his attenuated figure and ruffled his pointed beard, tinged with premature grey. He dug up all manner of weeds, some large, some small, and shaking them carefully free of the adhesive earth, flung them into a wheel-barrow by his side.

It was approaching noon, and in spite of the chilly gusts of wind, the sun beat down hotly upon the exposed front of Dead Man's Cottage. Every now and then Mr. Quincunx would leave his work; and retiring into his kitchen, proceed with elaborate nicety to stir a small pot of broth which simmered over the fire. He was a queer mixture of epicurean preciseness and ascetic indifference in these matters, but, on the whole, the epicurean tendency predominated, owing to a subtle poetic passion in the eccentric man, for the symbolic charm of all these little necessities of life. The lighting of his fire in the morning, the crackling of the burning sticks, and their fragrant smell, gave Mr. Quincunx probably as much pleasure as anything else in the world.

Every bowl of that fresh milk and brown bread, which, prepared with meticulous care, formed his

staple diet, was enjoyed by him with more ceremonious concentration than most gourmands devote to their daintiest meat and wine.

The broiling of his chicken on Sunday was a function of solemn ritual. Mr. Quincunx bent over the bird, basting it with butter, in the absorbed manner of a priest preparing the sacrament.

The digging up of onions or lettuces in his garden, and the stripping them of their outer leaves, was a ceremony to be performed in no light or casual haste, but with a prepared and concentrated spirit.

No profane hand ever touched the little canister of tea from which Mr. Quincunx, at the same precise hour every day, replenished his tea-pot.

In all these material things his scrupulous and punctilious nicety never suffered the smallest diminution. His mind might be agitated to a point bordering upon despair, but he still, with mechanical foresight, sawed the fagots in his wood-shed and drew the water from his well.

As he pulled up weed after weed, on this particular morning, his mind was in a state of extreme nervous agitation. Mr. Romer had called him up the night before to the House, and had announced that his present income — the sum regarded by the recluse as absolutely secure — was now entirely to cease, and in the place of it he was destined to receive, in return for horrible clerical work performed in Yeoborough, a considerably smaller sum, as Mr. Romer's paid dependent.

The idea of working in an office was more distasteful to Mr. Quincunx than it is possible to indicate to any person not actually acquainted with him. His

exquisitely characteristic hand, admirably adapted to the meticulous diary he had kept for years, was entirely unsuited to competing with type-writing machines and machine-like type-writers. The walk to Yeoborough too, — a matter of some four or five miles — loomed upon him as a hideous purgatory. Walking tired him much more than working in his garden; and he had a nervous dread of those casual encounters and salutations on the way, which the habitual use of the same road to one's work necessarily must imply.

His mind anticipated with hideous minuteness every detail of his future dreary life. He decided that even at the cost of the sacrifice of the last of his little luxuries he would make a point of going one way at least by train. That walk, twice a day, through the depressing suburbs of Yeoborough was more than he could bear to contemplate. It was characteristic of him that he never for a moment considered the possibility of an appeal to law. Law and lawyers were for Mr. Quincunx, with his instincts of an amiable anarchist, simply the engines through which the rich and powerful worked their will upon the weak and helpless.

It was equally characteristic of him that it never entered his head to throw up his cottage, pack his scanty possessions and seek his fortune in another place. It was not only Lacrima that held him from such a resolution. It was as impossible for him to think of striking out in a new soil as it would have been for an aged frog to leave the pond of its nativity and sally forth across the fields in search of new waters. It was this inability to "strike out" and

grapple with the world on equal terms, that had led, in the beginning, to his curious relation to the Romers. He clung to Susan Romer for no other reason than that she supplied a link between his past and his present.

His lips trembled with anger and his hand shook, as he recalled the interview of the preceding night. The wife had annoyed him almost more than the husband. His brutality had been gross and frank. The lascivious joy of a strong nature, in deliberately outraging a weaker one, had gleamed forth from his jeering eyes.

But there had been an unction, an hypocritical sentimentality, about Mrs. Romer's tone, that had made him hate her the more bitterly of the two. The fact that she also — stupid lump of fawning obesity as she was! — was a victim of this imperial tyrant, did not in the least assuage him. The helot who is under the lash hates the helot who crouches by the master's chair, more deeply than he hates the master. It is because of this unhappy law of nature that there are so few successful revolts among our social Pariahs. The well-constituted ruler of men divides his serfs into those who hold the whip and those who are whipped. Yes, he hated her the most. But how he hated them both!

The heart of your true Pariah is a strange and dark place, concealing depths of rancorous animosity, which those who over-ride and discount such feelings rarely calculate upon. It is a mistake to assume that this curious rôle — the rôle of being a Pariah upon our planet — is one confined to the submerged, the outcast, the criminal.

There are Pariahs in every village. It might be said that there are Pariahs in every family. The Pariah is one who is born with an innate inability to deal vigorously and effectively with his fellow animals. One sees these unfortunates every day — on the street, in the office, at the domestic hearth. One knows them by the queer look in their eyes; the look of animals who have been crushed rather than tamed.

It is not only that they are weaker than the rest and less effectual. They are *different.* It is in their difference that the tragedy of their fate lies. Commonplace weaklings, who are not born Pariahs, have in their hearts the same standards, the same ambitions, the same prejudices, as those who rule the world. Such weaklings venerate, admire, and even *love* the strong unscrupulous hands, the crafty unscrupulous brains, who push them to and fro like pawns.

But the Pariah does not venerate the Power that oppresses him. He despises it and hates it. Long-accumulated loathing rankles in his heart. He is crushed but not won. He is penned, like a shorn sheep; but his thoughts "wander through Eternity."

And it is this difference, separating him from the rest, that excites such fury in those who oppress him. The healthy-minded prosperous man is irritated beyond endurance by this stranger within the gate — this incorrigible, ineffectual critic, cumbering his road. The mob, too, always ready, like spiteful, cawing rooks, to fall upon a wounded comrade, howl remorselessly for his destruction. The Pariah is seldom able to retain the sweetness of his natural affections.

Buffetted by the unconscious brutality of those about him, he retorts with conscious and unfathomable hatred. His soul festers and gangrenes within him, and the loneliness of his place among his fellows leads him to turn upon them all — like a rat in a gin. The pure-minded capable man, perceiving the rancorous misanthropy of this sick spirit, longs to trample him into the mud, to obliterate him, to forget him. But the man whose strength and cunning is associated with lascivious perversity, wishes to have him by his side, to humiliate, to degrade, to outrage. A taste to be surrounded by Pariahs is an interesting peculiarity of a certain successful class. Such companionship is to them a perpetual and pleasing reminder of their own power.

Mr. Quincunx was a true Pariah in his miserable combination of inability to strike back at the people who injured him, and inability to forget their injuries. He propitiated their tastes, bent to their will, conciliated their pride, agreed with their opinions, and hated them with demoniacal hatred.

As he pulled up his weeds in the hot sun, this particular morning, Maurice Quincunx fantastically consoled himself by imagining all manner of disasters to his enemies. Every time he touched with his hands the soft-crumbling earth, he uttered a kind of half-conscious prayer that, in precisely such a way, the foundations of Nevilton House should crumble and yield. Under his hat — for he was hypochondriacally apprehensive about sunstrokes — flapped and waved in the wind a large cabbage leaf, placed carefully at the back of his head to protect his neck as he bent down. The shadow of this cabbage leaf, as it was

thrown across the dusty path, assumed singular and sinister shapes, giving the impression sometimes that the head of Mr. Quincunx was gnome-like or goblin-like in its proportions.

Perhaps the most unfortunate characteristic of Parialis is that though they cling instinctively to one another they are irritated and provoked by each other's peculiarities.

This unhappy tendency was now to receive sad confirmation in our weed-puller's case, for he was suddenly interrupted by the appearance at his gate of Lacrima Traffio.

He rose to meet her, and without inviting her to pass the entrance, for he was extremely nervous of village gossip, and one never knew what a casual passer-by might think, he leant over the low wall and talked with her from that security.

She seemed in a very depressed and pitiable mood and the large dark eyes that fixed themselves upon her friend's face were full of an inarticulate appeal.

"I cannot endure it much longer," she said. "It gets worse and worse every day."

Maurice Quincunx knew perfectly well what she meant, but the curious irritation to which I have just referred drove him to rejoin:

"What gets worse?"

"Their unkindness," answered the girl with a quick reproachful look, "their perpetual unkindness."

"But they feed you well, don't they?" said the hermit, removing his hat and rearranging the cabbage-leaf so as to adapt it to the new angle of the sun. "And they don't beat you. You haven't to scrub floors or mend clothes. People, like you and I, must

be thankful for being allowed to eat and sleep at all on this badly-arranged earth."

"I keep thinking of Italy," murmured Lacrima. "I think it is your English ways that trouble me. I don't believe — I can't believe — they always mean to be unkind. But English people are so heartless!"

"You seemed to like that Andersen fellow well enough," grumbled Mr. Quincunx.

"How can you be so silly, Maurice?" cried the girl, slipping through the gate in spite of its owner's furtive glances down the road. "How can you be so silly?"

She moved past him, up the path, and seated herself upon the edge of the wheel-barrow.

"You can go on with your weeding," she said, "I can talk to you while you work."

"Of course," murmured Mr. Quincunx, making no effort to resume his labour, "you naturally find a handsome fellow like that, a more pleasant companion than me. I don't blame you. I understand it very well."

Lacrima impatiently took up a handful of groundsel and spurge from the dusty heap by her side and flung them into the path.

"You make me quite angry with you, Maurice," she cried. "How can you say such things after all that has happened between us?"

"That's the way," jeered the man bitterly, plucking at his beard. "That's the way! Go on abusing me because you are not living at your full pleasure, like a stall-fed upper-class lady!"

"I shan't stay with you another moment," cried Lacrima, with tears in her eyes, "if you are so unkind."

As soon as he had reduced her to this point, Mr. Quincunx instantaneously became gentle and tender. This is one of the profoundest laws of a Pariah's being. He resents it when his companion in helplessness shows a spirit beyond his own, but directly such a one has been driven into reciprocal wretchedness, his own equanimity is automatically regained.

After only the briefest glance at the gate, he put his arms round the girl and kissed her affectionately. She returned his embrace with interest, disarranging as she did so the cabbage-leaf in his hat, and causing it to flutter down upon the path. They leant together for a while in silence, against the edge of the wheel-barrow, their hands joined.

Thus associated they would have appeared, to the dreaded passer-by, in the light of a pair of extremely sentimental lovers, whose passion had passed into the stage of delicious melancholia. The wind whirled the dust in little eddies around them and the sun beat down upon their heads.

"You must be kind to me when I come to tell you how unhappy I am," said the Italian. "You are the only real friend I have in the world."

It is sad to have to relate that these tender words brought a certain thrill of alarm into the heart of Mr. Quincunx. He felt a sudden apprehension lest she might indicate that it was his duty to run away with her, and face the world in remote regions.

No one but a born Pariah could have endured the confiding clasp of that little hand and the memory of so ardent a kiss without being roused to an impetuosity of passion ready to dare anything to make her its own.

Instead of pursuing any further the question of his friend's troubles, Mr. Quincunx brought the conversation round to his own.

"The worst that could happen to me has happened," he said, and he told her of his interview with the Romers the day before. The girl flushed with anger.

"But this is abominable!" she cried, "simply abominable! You'd better go at once and talk it over with Mrs. Seldom. Surely, surely, something can be done! It is clear they have robbed you of your money. It is a disgraceful thing! Santa Maria — what a country this is!"

"It is no use," sighed the man helplessly. "Mrs. Seldom can't help me. She is poor enough herself. And she will know as well as I do that in the matter of law I am entirely in their hands. My aunt had absolute confidence in Mr. Romer and no confidence in me. No doubt she arranged it with them that they were to dole me out the money like a charity. Mr. Romer did once talk about my *lending* it to him, and his paying interest on it, and so forth; but he managed all my aunt's affairs, and I don't know what arrangement he made with her. My aunt never liked me really. I think if she were alive now she would probably support them in what they are doing. She would certainly say, — she always used to say — that it would do me good to do a little honest work." He pronounced the words "honest work" with concentrated bitterness.

"Probably," he went on, "Mrs. Seldom would say the same. I know I should be extremely unwilling to try and make her see how horrible to me the idea of

work of this kind is. She would never understand. She would think it was only that I wanted to remain a "gentleman" and not to lose caste. She would probably tell me that a great many gentlemen have worked in offices before now. I daresay they have, and I hope they enjoyed it! I know what these gentlemen-workers are, and how easy things are made for them. They won't be made easy for me. I can tell you that, Lacrima!"

The girl drew a deep sigh, and walked slowly a few paces down the path, meditating, with her hands behind her. Presently she turned.

"Perhaps after all," she said, "it won't be as bad as you fancy. I know the head-clerk in Mr. Romer's Yeoborough office and he is quite a nice man — altogether different from that Lickwit."

Mr. Quincunx stroked his beard with a trembling hand. "Of course I knew you'd say that, Lacrima. You are just like the rest. You women all think, at the bottom of your hearts, that men are no good if they can't make money. I believe you have an idea that I ought to do what people call 'get on a bit in the world.' If you think that, it only shows how little you understand me. I have no intention of 'getting on.' I *won't* 'get on'! I would sooner walk into Auber Lake and end the whole business!"

The suddenness and injustice of this attack really did rouse the Italian to anger. "Good-bye," she said with a dark flash in her eyes. "I see its no use talking to you when you are in this mood. You have never, *never* spoken to me in that tone before. Good-bye! I can open the gate for myself, thank you."

She walked away from him and passed out into the lane. He stood watching her with a queer haggard look on his face, his sorrowful grey eyes staring in front of him, as if in the presence of an apparition. Then, very slowly, he resumed his work, leaving however the fallen cabbage-leaf unnoticed on the ground.

The weeds in the wheel-barrow, the straight banked-up lines of potatoes and lettuces, wore, as he returned to them, that curious air of forlorn desertion which is one of nature's bitterest commentaries upon the folly of such scenes.

A sickening sense of emptiness took possession of him, and in a moment or two became unendurable. He flung a handful of weeds to the ground and ran impetuously to the gate and out into the lane. It was too late. A group of farm-labourers laughing and shouting, and driving before them a herd of black pigs, blocked up the road. He could not bring himself to pass them, thus hatless and in his shirt-sleeves. Besides, they must have seen the girl, and they would know he was pursuing her.

He returned slowly up the path to his house, and — to avoid being seen by the men — entered his kitchen, and sat gloomily down upon a chair. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked with contemptuous unconcern. The room had that smell of mortuary dust which rooms in small houses often acquire in the summer. He sat down once more on a chair, his hands upon his knees, and stared vacantly in front of him. A thrush outside the window was cracking a snail upon a stone. When the shouts of the men died away, this was the only sound that came

to him, except the continual "tick — tick — tick — tick" of the clock, which seemed to be occupied in driving nails into the heavy coffin-lid of every mortal joy that time had ever brought forth.

That same night in Nevilton House was a night of wretched hours for Lacrima, but of hours of a wretchedness more active than that which made the hermit of Dead Man's Cottage pull the clothes over his head and turn his face to the wall, long ere the twilight had vanished from his garden.

On leaving her friend thus abruptly, her heart full of angry revolt, Lacrima had seen the crowd of men and animals approaching, and to escape them had scrambled into a field on the border of the road. Following a little path which led across it, and crossing two more meadows, she flung herself down under the shadow of some great elms, in a sort of grassy hollow beneath an over-grown hedge, and gave full vent to her grief. The hollow in which she hid herself was a secluded and lonely spot, and no sound reached her but the monotonous summer-murmur of the flies and the rustle of the wind-troubled branches. Lying thus, prone on her face, her broad-brimmed hat with its poppy-trimmings thrown down at her side, and her limbs trembling with the violence of her sobs, Lacrima seemed to insert into that alien landscape an element of passionate feeling quite foreign to its sluggish fertility. Not alien to the spot, however, was another human form, that at the same hour had been led to wander among those lush meadows.

The field behind the high bank and thick-set hedge which overshadowed the unhappy girl, was a large and spacious one, "put up," as country people say,

"for hay," but as yet untouched by the mowers' machines. Here, in the heat of the noon, walked the acquisitive Mr. John Goring, calculating the value of this crop of grass, and deciding upon the appropriate date of its cutting.

What curious irony is it, in the blind march of events, which so frequently draws to the place of our exclusive sorrow the one particular spectator that we would most avoid? One talks lightly of coincidence and of chance; but who that has walked through life observingly has not been driven to pause with sad questioning before accidents and occurrences that seem as though some conscious malignity in things had *arranged* them? Are there, perhaps, actual telepathic vibrations at work about us, drawing the hunter to his prey — the prey to the hunter? Is the innocent object of persecution, hiding from its persecutors, compelled by a fatal psychic law — the law of its own terror — to call subconsciously upon the very power it is fleeing from; to betray, against its will, the path of its own retreat? Lacrima in any case, as she lay thus prostrate, her poppy-trimmed hat beside her, and her brown curls flecked with spots of sun and shadow, brought into that English landscape a strangely remote touch, — a touch of tragic and passionate colour. A sweet bruised exile, she seemed, from another region, flung down, among all this umbrageous rankness, to droop like a transplanted flower. Certainly the sinister magic, whatever it was, that had drawn Mr. Goring in that fatal direction, was a magic compounded of the attraction of contrary elements.

If Mr. Romer represented the occult power of the

sandstone hill, his brother-in-law was the very epitome and culmination of the valley's inert clay. The man breathed clay, looked clay, smelt clay, understood clay, exploited clay, and in a literal sense *was* clay.

If there is any truth in the scientific formula about the "survival" of those most "adapted" to their "environment," Mr. Goring was sure of a prolonged and triumphant sojourn on this mortal globe. For his "environment" was certainly one of clay — and to clay he certainly was most prosperously "adapted."

It was not long before the tragic sobs of the unhappy Lacrima, borne across the field on the east-wind, arrested the farmer's attention. He stood still, and listened, snuffing the air, like a great jungle-boar. Then with rapid but furtive steps he crossed over to where the sound proceeded, and slipping down cautiously through a gap in the hedge, made his way towards the secluded hollow, breathing heavily like an animal on a trail.

Her fit of crying having subsided, Lacrima turned round on her back, and remained motionless, gazing up at the blue sky. Extended thus on the ruffled grass, her little fingers nervously plucking at its roots and her breast still heaving, the young girl offered a pitiful enough picture to any casual intruder. Slight and fragile though she was, the softness and charm of her figure witnessed to her Latin origin. With her dusky curls and olive complexion, she might, but for her English dress, have been taken for a strayed gipsy, recovering from some passionate quarrel with her Romany lover.

"What's the matter, Miss Lacrima?" was the farmer's greeting as his gross form obtruded itself against the sky-line.

The girl started violently, and scrambled rapidly to her feet. Mr. Goring stepped awkwardly down the grassy slope and held out his hand.

"Good morning," he said without removing his hat. "I should have thought 'twas time for you to be up at the House. 'Tis past a quarter of one."

"I was just resting," stammered the girl. "I hope I have not hurt your grass." She looked apprehensively down at the pathetic imprint on the ground.

"No, no! Missie," said the man. "That's nothing. 'Tis hard to cut, in a place like this. Maybe they'll let it alone. Besides, this field ain't for hay. The cows will be in here tomorrow."

Lacrima looked at the watch on her wrist.

"Yes, you are right," she said. "I am late. I must be running back. Your brother does not like our being out when he comes in to lunch." She picked up her hat and made as if she would pass him. But he barred her way.

"Not so quick, lassie, not so quick," he said. "Those that come into farmers' fields must not be too proud to pass the time of day with the farmer."

As he spoke he permitted his little voracious pig's eyes to devour her with an amorous leer. All manner of curious thoughts passed through his head. It was only yesterday that his brother-in-law had been talking to him of this girl. Certainly it would be extremely satisfactory to be the complete master of that supple, shrinking figure, and of that frightened

little bosom, that rose and fell now, like the heart of a panting hare.

After all, she was only a sort of superior servant, and with servants of every kind the manner of the rapacious Mr. Goring was alternately brutal and endearing. Encouraged by the isolation of the spot and the shrinking alarm of the girl, he advanced still nearer and laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

"Come, little wench," he said, "I will answer for it if you're late, up at the House. Sit down a bit with me, and let's make ourselves nice and comfortable."

Lacrima trembled with terror. She was afraid to push him away, and try to scramble out of the hollow, lest in doing so she should put herself still further at his mercy. She wondered if anyone in the road would hear if she screamed aloud. Her quick Latin brain resorted mechanically to a diplomatic subterfuge. "What kind of field have you got over that hedge?" she asked, with a quiver in her voice.

"A very nice field, my dear," replied the farmer, removing his hand from her shoulder and thinking in his heart that these foreign girls were wonderfully easy to manage.

"I'll show it to you if you like. There's a pretty little place for people like you and me to have a chat in, up along over there." He pointed through the hedge to a small copse of larches that grew green and thick at the corner of the hay-field.

She let him give her his hand and pull her out of the hollow. Quite passively, too, she followed him, as he sought the easiest spot through which he might help her to surmount the difficulties of the intervening hedge.

When he had at last decided upon the place, "Go first, please, Mr. Goring," she murmured, "and then you can pull me up."

He turned his back upon her and began laboriously ascending the bank, dragging himself forward by the aid of roots and ferns. It had been easy enough to slide down this declivity. It was much less easy to climb up. At length, however, stung by nettles and pricked by thorns, and with earth in his mouth, he swung himself round at the top, ready to help her to follow him.

A vigorous oath escaped his lips. She was already a third of the way across the field, running madly and desperately, towards the gate into the lane.

Mr. Goring shook his fist after her retreating figure. "All right, Missie," he muttered aloud, "all right! If you had been kind to the poor farmer, he might have let you off. But now" — and he dug his stick viciously into the earth — "There'll be no dilly-dallying or nonsense about this business. I'll tell Romer I'm ready for this marriage-affair as soon as he likes. I'll teach you — my pretty darling!"

That night the massive Leonian masonry of Nevilton House seemed especially heavy and antipathetic to the child of the Apennines, as it rose, somnolent and oppressive about her, in the hot midsummer air.

In their spacious rooms, looking out upon the east court with its dove-cotes and herbacious borders, the two girls were awake and together.

The wind had fallen, and the silence about the place was as oppressive to Lacrima's mind as the shadow of some colossal raven's wing.

The door which separated their chambers was ajar, and Gladys, her yellow hair loose upon her shoulders, had flung herself negligently down in a deep wicker-chair at the side of her companion's bed.

The luckless Pariah, her brown curls tied back from her pale forehead by a dark ribbon, was lying supine upon her pillows with a look of troubled terror in her wide-open eyes. One long thin arm lay upon the coverlet, the fingers tightened upon an open book.

At the beginning of her "visit" to Nevilton House she had clung desperately to these precious night-hours, when the great establishment was asleep; and she had even been so audacious as to draw the bolt of the door which separated her from her cousin. But that wilful young tyrant had pretended to her mother that she often "got frightened" in the night, so orders had gone out that the offending bolt should be removed.

After this, Gladys had her associate quite at her mercy, and the occasions were rare when the pleasure of being allowed to read herself to sleep was permitted to the younger girl.

It was curiously irritating to the yellow-haired despot to observe the pleasure which Lacrima derived from these solitary readings. Gladys got into the habit of chattering on, far into the night, so as to make sure that, when she did retire, her cousin would be too weary to do anything but fall asleep.

As the two girls lay thus side by side, the one in her chair, and the other in her bed, under the weight of the night's sombre expectancy, the contrast between them was emphasized to a fine dramatic point. The large-winged bat that fluttered every now and

then across the window might have caught, if for a brief moment it could have been endowed with human vision, a strange sense of the tragic power of one human being over another, when the restriction of a common roof compels their propinquity.

One sometimes seeks to delude oneself in the fond belief that our European domestic hearths are places of peace and freedom, compared with the dark haunts of savagery in remoter lands. It is not true! The long-evolved system that, with us, groups together, under one common authority, beings as widely sundered as the poles, is a system that, for all its external charm, conceals, more often than anyone could suppose, subtle and gloomy secrets, as dark and heathen as any in those less favoured spots.

The nervous organization of many frail human animals is such that the mere fact of being compelled, out of custom and usage and economic helplessness, to live in close relation with others, is itself a tragic purgatory.

It is often airily assumed that the obstinate and terrible struggles of life are encountered abroad — far from home — in desolate contention with the elements or with enemies. It is not so! The most obstinate and desperate struggles of all — struggles for the preservation of one's most sacred identity, of one's inmost liberty of action and feeling — take place, and have their advances and retreats, their treacheries and their betrayals, under the hypocritical calm of the domestic roof. Those who passionately resent any agitation, any free thought, any legislative interference, which might cause these fortresses of seclusion to enlarge their boundaries, forget, in their

poetic idealization of the Gods of the Hearth, that tragedies are often enacted under that fair consecration which would dim the sinister repute of Argos or of Thebes. The Platonic speculations which, all through human history, have erected their fanciful protests against these perils, may often be unscientific and ill-considered. But there is a smouldering passion of heroic revolt behind such dreams, which it is not always wise to overlook.

As these two girls, the fair-haired and the dark-haired, let the solemn burden of the night thus press unheeded upon them, there would have needed no fantastic imagination, in an invisible observer, to be aware of the tense vibration between them of some formidable spiritual encounter.

High up above the mass of Leonian stone which we have named Nevilton House, the Milky Way trailed its mystery of far-off brightness across the incredible gulfs. What to it was the fact that one human heart should tremble like a captured bird in the remorseless power of another?

It was not to this indifferent sky, stretched equally over all, that hands could be lifted. And yet the scene between the girls must have appeared, to such an invisible watcher, as linked to a dramatic contest above and beyond their immediate human personalities.

In this quiet room the "Two Mythologies" were grappling; each drawing its strength from forces of an origin as baffling to reason as the very immensity of those spaces above, so indifferent to both!

The hatred that Gladys bore to Lacrima's enjoyment of her midnight readings was a characteristic

indication of the relations between the girls. It is always infuriating to a well-constituted nature to observe these little pathetic devices of pleasure in a person who has no firm grip upon life. It excites the same healthy annoyance as when one sees some absurd animal that ought, properly speaking, not to be alive at all, deriving ridiculous satisfaction from some fantastic movement incredible to sound senses.

The Pariah had, as a matter of fact, defeated her healthy-minded cousin by using one of those sly tricks which Pariahs alone indulge in; and had craftily acquired the habit of slipping away earlier to her room, and snatching little oases of solitary happiness before the imperious young woman came upstairs. It was in revenge for these evasions that Gladys was even now announcing to her companion a new and calculated outrage upon her slave's peace of mind.

Every Pariah has some especial and peculiar dread, — some nervous mania. Lacrima had several innate terrors. The strongest of all was a shuddering dread of the supernatural. Next to this, what she most feared was the idea of deep cold water. Lakes, rivers, and chilly inland streams, always rather alarmed than inspired her. The thought of mill-ponds, as they eddied and gurgled in the darkness, often came to her as a supreme fear, and the image of indrawn dark waters, sucked down beneath weirs and dams, was a thing she could not contemplate without trembling. It was no doubt the Genoese blood in her, crying aloud for the warm blue waves of the Mediterranean and shrinking from the chill of our English ditches, that accounted for this peculi-

arity. The poor child had done her best to conceal her feeling, but Gladys, alert as all healthy minded people are, to seize upon the silly terrors of the ill-constituted, had not let it pass unobserved, and was now serenely prepared to make good use of it, as a heaven-sent opportunity for revenge.

It must be noted, that in the centre of the north garden of Nevilton House, surrounded by cypress-bordered lawns and encircled by a low hedge of carefully clipped rosemary, was a deep round pond.

This pond, built entirely of Leonian stone, lent itself to the playing of a splendid fountain — a fountain which projected from an ornamental island, covered with overhanging ferns.

The fountain only played on state occasions, and the coolness and depth of the water, combined with the fact that the pond had a stone bottom, gave the place admirable possibilities for bathing. Gladys herself, full of animal courage and buoyant energy, had made a custom during the recent hot weather of rising from her bed early in the morning, before the servants were up, and enjoying a matutinal plunge.

She was a practised swimmer and had been lately learning to dive; and the sensation of slipping out of the silent house, garbed in a bathing-dress, with sandals on her feet, and an opera-cloak over her shoulders, was thrilling to every nerve of her healthy young body. Impervious animal as she was, she would hardly have been human if those dew-drenched lawns and exquisite morning odours had not at least crossed the margin of her consciousness. She had hitherto been satisfied with a proud sense of superiority over her timid companion, and Lacrima so far,

had been undisturbed by these excursions, except in the welcoming of her cousin on her return, dripping and laughing, and full of whimsical stories of how she had peeped down over the terrace-wall, and seen the milk-men, in the field below, driving in their cattle.

Looking about, however, in her deliberate feline way, for some method of pleasant revenge, she had suddenly hit upon this bathing adventure as a heaven-inspired opportunity. The thought of it when it first came to her as she languidly sunned herself, like a great cat, on the hot parapet of the pond, had made her positively laugh for joy. She would compel her cousin to accompany her on these occasions!

Lacrima was not only terrified of water, but was abnormally reluctant and shy with regard to any risk of being observed in strange or unusual garments.

Gladys had stretched herself out on the Leonian margin of the pond with a thrilling sense of delight at the prospect thus offered. She would be able to gratify, at one and the same time, her profound need to excel in the presence of an inferior, and her insatiable craving to outrage that inferior's reserve.

The sun-warmed slabs of Leonian stone, upon which she had so often basked in voluptuous contentment seemed dumbly to encourage and stimulate her in this heathen design. How entirely they were the accomplices of all that was dominant in her destiny — these yellow blocks of stone that had so enriched her house! They answered to her own blond beauty, to her own sluggish remorselessness. She loved their tawny colour, their sandy texture, their enduring strength. She loved to see them around and about

her, built into walls, courts, terraces and roofs. They gave support and weight to all her pretensions.

Thus it had been with an almost mystical thrill of exultation that she had felt the warmth of the Leonian slabs caress her limbs, as this new and exciting scheme passed through her mind.

And now, luxuriously seated in her low chair by her friend's side she was beginning to taste the reward of her inspiration.

"Yes," she said, crossing her hands negligently over her knees, "it is so dull bathing alone. I really think you'll have to do it with me, dear! You'll like it all right when once you begin. It is only the effort of starting. The water isn't so very cold, and where the sun warms the parapet it is lovely."

"I can't, Gladys," pleaded the other, from her bed, "I can't — I can't!"

"Nonsense, child. Don't be so silly! I tell you, you'll enjoy it. Besides, there's nothing like bathing to keep one healthy. Mother was only saying last night to father how much she wished you would begin it."

Lacrima's fingers let her book slip through them. It slid down unnoticed upon the floor and lay open there.

She sat up and faced her cousin.

"Gladys," she said, with grave intensity, "if you make your mother insist on my doing this, you are more wicked than I ever dreamed you would be."

Gladys regarded her with indolent interest.

"Its only at first the water feels cold," she said. "You get used to it, after the first dip. I always race round the lawn afterwards, to get warm. What's the matter now, baby?"

These final words were due to the fact that the Pariah had suddenly put up her hands to her face and was shaking with sobs. Gladys rose and bent over her. "Silly child," she said, "must I kiss its tears away? Must I pet it and cosset it?"

She pulled impatiently at the resisting fingers, and loosening them, after a struggle, did actually go so far as to touch the girl's cheek with her lips. Then sinking back into her chair she resumed her interrupted discourse.

The taste of salt tears had not, it seemed, softened her into any weak compliance. Really strong and healthy natures learn the art, by degrees, of proving adamant, to the insidious cunning of these persuasions.

"Girls of our class," she announced sententiously, "must set the lower orders in England an example of hardiness. Father says it is dreadful how effeminate the labouring people are becoming. They are afraid of work, afraid of fresh air, afraid of cold water, afraid of discipline. They only think of getting more to eat and drink."

The Pariah turned her face to the wall and lay motionless, contemplating the cracks and crevices in the oak panelling.

Under the same indifferent stars the other Pariah of Nevilton was also staring hopelessly at the wall. What secrets these impassive surfaces, near the pillows of sleepers, could reveal, if they could only speak!

"Father says that what we all want is more physical training," Gladys went on. "This next winter you and I must do some practising in the Yeoborough Gymnasium. It is our superior physical

training, father says, which enables us to hold the mob in check. Just look at these workmen and peasants, how clumsily they slouch about!"

Lacrima turned round at this. "Your father and his friends are shamefully hard on their workmen. I wish they would strike again!"

Gladys smiled complacently. The scene was really beginning to surpass even what she had hoped.

"Why are you such a baby, Lacrima?" she said. "Stop a moment. I will show you the things you shall wear."

She glided off into her own room, and presently returned with a child's bathing dress.

"Look, dear! Isn't it lucky? I've had these in my wardrobe ever since we were at Eastbourne, years and years ago. They will not be a bit too small for you. Or if they are — it doesn't matter. No one will see us. And I'll lend you my mackintosh to go out in."

Lacrima's head sank back upon her pillows and she stared at her cousin with a look of helpless terror.

"You needn't look so horrified, you silly little thing. There's nothing to be afraid of. Besides, people oughtn't to give way to their feelings. They ought to be brave and show spirit. It's lucky for you you did come to us. There's no knowing what a cowardly little thing you'd have grown into, if you hadn't. Mother is quite right. It will do you ever so much good to bathe with me. You can't be drowned, you know. The water isn't out of your depth anywhere. Father says every girl in England ought to learn to swim, so as to be able to rescue people. He says that this is the great new idea of

the Empire — that we should all join in making the race braver and stronger. You are English now, you know — not Italian any more. I am going to take fencing lessons soon. Father says you never can tell what may happen, and we ought all to be prepared."

Lacrima did not speak. A vision of a fierce aggressive crowd of hard, hostile, healthy young persons, drilling, riding, shooting, fencing, and dragging such renegades as herself remorselessly along with them, blocked every vista of her mind.

"I hate the Empire!" she cried at last. Gladys had subsided once more into her chair — the little bathing-suit, symbol of our natural supremacy, clasped fondly in her lap.

"I know," she said, "where you get your socialistic nonsense from. Yes, I do! You needn't shake your head. You get it from Maurice Quincunx."

"I don't get it from anybody," protested the Pariah; and then, in a weak murmur, "it grows up naturally, in my heart."

"What is that you're saying?" cried Gladys. "Sometimes I think you are really not right in your mind. You mutter so. You mutter, and talk to yourself. It irritates me more than I can say. It would irritate a saint."

"I am sorry if I annoy you, cousin."

"Annoy me? It would take more than a little coward like you to annoy me! But I am not going to argue about it. Father says arguing is only fit for feeble people. He says we Romers never argue. We think, and then we *do*. I'm going to bed. So there's your book! I hope you'll enjoy it Miss Socialism!"

She picked up the volume from the floor and flung it into her cousin's lap. The gesture of contempt with which she did this would admirably have suited some Roman Drusilla tossing aside the culture of slaves.

An hour later the door between the two rooms was hesitatingly opened, and a white figure stole to the head of Gladys' couch. "You're not asleep, dear, are you? Oh Gladys, darling! Please, please, please, don't make me bathe with you! You don't know how I dread it."

But the daughter of the Romers vouchsafed no reply to this appeal, beyond a drowsy "Nonsense — nonsense — let's only pray tomorrow will be fine."

The night-owls, that swept, on heavy, flapping wings, over the village, from the tower of St. Catharine's Church to the pinnacles of the manor, brought no miraculous intervention from the resting-place of the Holy-Rood. What was St. Catharine doing that she had thus deserted the sanctuary of her name? Perhaps the Alexandrian saint found the magic of the heathen hill too strong for her; or perhaps because of its rank heresy, she had blotted her former shrine altogether from her tender memory.

CHAPTER VII

IDYLLIC PLEASURES

MORTIMER ROMER could not be called a many-sided man. His dominant lust for power filled his life so completely that he had little room for excursions into the worlds of art or literature. He was, however, by no means narrow or stupid in these matters. He had at least the shrewdness to recognize the depth of their influence over other people. Indeed, as he was so constantly occupied with this very question of influence, with the problem of what precise motives and impulses did actually stir and drive the average mass of humanity, it was natural that he should, sooner or later, have to assume some kind of definite attitude towards these things. The attitude he finally hit upon, as most harmonious with his temperament, was that of active and genial patronage combined with a modest denial of the possession of any personal knowledge or taste. He recognized that an occasion might easily arise, when some association with the æsthetic world, even of this modest and external kind, might prove extremely useful to him. He might find it advisable to make use of these alien forces, just as Napoleon found it necessary to make use of religion. The fact that he himself was devoid of ideal emotions, whether religious or æsthetic, mattered nothing. Only fools confined their psycho-

logical interest within the narrow limits of their subjective tastes. Humanity was influenced by these things, and Romer was concerned with influencing humanity. Not that these deviations into artistic by-paths carried him very far. He would invite "cultivated" people to stay with him in his noble House — at least they would appreciate that! —and then hand them over to the care of his charming daughter, a method of hospitality which, it must be confessed, seemed to meet with complete approval on the part of those concerned. Thus the name of the owner of Leo's Hill came to be associated, in many artistic and literary circles, with the names of such admirable and friendly patrons of these pursuits, as could be counted upon for practical and efficient, if not for intellectual aid, in the contest with an unsympathetic and materialistic world. It was not perhaps the more struggling and less prosperous artists who found him their friend. To most of these his attitude, though kind and attentive, was hardly cordial. He knew too little of the questions at issue, to risk giving his support to the Pariahs and Anarchists of Art. It was among the well-known and the successful that Mr. Romer's patronage was most evident. Success was a quality he admired in every field; and while, as has been hinted, his personal taste remained quite untouched, he was clever enough to pick up the more fashionable catchwords of current criticism, and to use them, when occasion served, with effective naturalness and apparent conviction.

Among other celebrities or semi-celebrities, across whose track he came, while on his periodic visits to

London, was a certain Ralph Dangelis, an American artist, whose masterly and audacious work was just then coming into vogue. True to his imperial instinct of surrounding himself with brilliant and prosperous clients, if such they could be called, he promptly invited the famous Westerner to come down and stay with him in Nevilton.

The American, who knew nothing of English country life, and was an impassioned and desperate pursuer of all new experiences, accepted this invitation, and appeared, among the quiet Somersetshire orchards, like a bolt from the blue; falling into the very centre of the small quaintly involved drama, whose acts and scenes we are now recording. Thus plunged into a completely new circle the distinguished adventurer very soon made himself most felicitously at home. He was of a frank and friendly disposition; at heart an obdurate and impenetrable egoist, but on the surface affable and kind to a quite exceptional degree. He had spent several years in both Paris and Rome, and hence it was in his power to adapt himself easily and naturally to European, if not to English ways. One result of his protracted visits to foreign cities was the faculty of casting off at pleasure his native accent — the accent of a citizen of Toledo, Ohio. He did not always do this. Sometimes it was his humour, especially in intercourse with ladies, to revert to most free and fearless provincialisms, and a certain boyish gaiety in him made him mischievously addicted to use such expressions when they seemed least of all acceptable, but under normal conditions it would have been difficult to gather from the tone of his language that he was anything but

an extremely well-travelled gentleman of Anglo-Saxon birth. He speedily made a fast friend of Gladys, who found his airy persiflage and elaborate courtesy eminently to her liking; and as the long summer days succeeded one another and brought the visitor into more and more familiar relation with Nevilton ways and customs, it seemed as though his sojourn in that peaceful retreat was likely to be indefinitely prolonged. It may be well believed that their guest's attraction to Gladys did not escape the notice of the girl's parents. Mr. Romer took the trouble to make sundry investigations as to the status of Mr. Dangelis in his native Ohio; and it was with unmixed satisfaction that both he and his wife received the intelligence that he was the son and the only son of one of Toledo's most "prominent" citizens, a gentleman actively and effectively engaged in furthering the progress of civilization by the manufacturing of automobiles. Dangelis was, indeed, a prospective, if not an actual, millionaire, and, from all that could be learned, it appeared that the prominent citizen of Toledo handed over to his son an annual allowance equal to the income of many crowned heads.

The Pariah of Nevilton House — the luckless child of the Apennines — found little to admire in this energetic wanderer. His oratorical manner, his abrupt, aggressive courtesies, his exuberant high spirits, the sweep and swing of his vigorous personality, the extraordinary mixture in him of pedantry and gaiety, jarred upon her sensitive over-strung nerves. In his boyish desire to please her, hearing that she came from Italy, the good-natured artist

would frequently turn the conversation round to the beauty and romance of that "garden of the world," as he was pleased to style her home; but the tone of these discourses increased rather than diminished Lacrima's obstinate reserve. He had a habit of referring to her country as if it were a place whose inhabitants only existed, by a considerate dispensation of Providence, to furnish a charming background for certain invaluable relics of antiquity. These precious fragments, according to this easy view of things, appeared to survive, together with their appropriate guardians, solely with the object of enlarging and inspiring the vocarious "mentality" of wayfarers from London and New York. Grateful as Lacrima was for the respite the artist brought her from the despotism of her cousin, she could not bring herself to regard him, so far as she herself was concerned, with anything but extreme reserve and caution.

One peculiarity he displayed, filled her with shy dismay. Dangelis had a trick of staring at the people with whom he associated, as if with a kind of quizzical analysis. He threw her into a turmoil of wretched embarrassment by some of his glances. She was troubled and frightened, without being able to get at the secret of her agitation. Sometimes she fancied that he was wondering what he could make of her as a model. The idea that anything of this kind should be expected of her filled her with nervous dread. At other times the wild idea passed through her brain that he was making covert overtures to her, of an amorous character. She thought she intercepted once or twice a look upon his face of the

particular kind which always filled her with shrinking apprehension. This illusion — if it were an illusion — was far more alarming than any tendency he might display to pounce on her for æsthetic purposes; for the Pariah's association with the inhabitants of Nevilton House had not given her a pleasing impression of human amorousness.

Shortly after Dangelis' arrival, Mr. Romer found it necessary to visit London again for a few days; and the artist was rather relieved than otherwise by his departure. He felt freer, and more at liberty to express his ideas, when left alone with the three women. For himself, however varied their attitude to him might be, he found them all, in their different ways, full of stimulating interest. With Mrs. Romer he soon became perfectly at home; and discovered a mischievous and profane pleasure in the process of exciting and encouraging all her least lady-like characteristics. He would follow her into the spacious Nevilton kitchens, where the good lady was much more at home than in her stately drawing room; and watch with unconventional interest her rambling domestic colloquies with Mrs. Murphy the housekeeper, Jane the cook, and Lily the house-maid.

The men-servants, of whom Mr. Romer kept two, always avoided, with scrupulous refinement, these unusual gatherings. They discoursed, in the pantry, upon their mistress' dubious behavior, and came to the conclusion that she was no more of a "real lady" than her visitor from America was a "real gentleman."

Dangelis made some new and amazing discovery in Susan Romer's character every day. In all his

experiences from San Francisco to New York, and from Paris to Vienna, he had never encountered anything in the least resembling her.

He could never make out how deep her apparent simplicity went, nor how ingrained and innate was her lethargic submission to circumstances. Nothing in the woman shocked him; neither her vulgarity nor her grossness. And as for her sly, sleepy, feline malice, he loved to excite and provoke it, as he would have loved to have excited a slumbering animal in a cage. He delighted in the way she wrinkled up her eyes. He delighted in the way she smacked her lips over her food. He loved watching her settling herself to sleep in her high-backed Sheraton chair in the kitchen, or in her more modern lounge in the great entrance hall. He never grew tired of asking her questions about the various personages of Nevilton, their relation to Mr. Romer, and Mr. Romer's relation to them. He used to watch her sometimes, as in drowsy sensual enjoyment she would bask in the hot sunshine on the terrace, or drift in her slow stealthy manner about the garden-paths, as if she were a great fascinating tame puma. He made endless sketches of her, in his little note-books, some of them of the most fantastic, and even Rabelaisean character. He had certainly never anticipated just this, when he accepted the shrewd financier's invitation to his Elizabethan home. And if Susan Romer delighted him, Gladys Romer absolutely bewitched him. He treated her as if she were no grown-up young lady, but a romping and quite unscrupulous child; and the wily Gladys, quickly perceiving how greatly he was pleased by any naive display of youth-

ful malice, or greed, or sensuality, or vanity, took good care to put no rein upon herself in the expression of her primitive emotions.

It was with Lacrima that Ralph Dangelis found himself on ground that was less secure, but in the genial aplomb of his all-embracing good-fellowship, it was only by degrees that he became conscious even of this. He found the place not only extraordinarily harmonious to his general temper, but extremely inspiring to his imaginative work. It only needed the securing of a few mechanical contrivances, a studio, for instance, with a north-light, to have made his sojourn at Nevilton one of the most prolific summers, in regard to his art, that he had experienced since his student days in Rome. He began vaguely to wish in the depths of his mind that it were possible for these good Romers to bestow upon him in perpetuity some pleasant airy chamber in their great house, so that he might not have to lose, for many summers to come, these agreeable and scandalous gossippings with the mother and these still more agreeable flirtations with the delicious daughter. This bold and fantastic idea was less a fabric of airy speculation than might have been supposed; for if the American was enchanted with his entertainers, his entertainers, at any rate the mother and the daughter, were extremely well pleased with him. The free sweep of his capacious sympathy, the absence in him of any punctilious gentility, the large and benignant atmosphere he diffused round him, and the mixture of cynical realism with considerate chivalry, were things so different from anything they had been accustomed to, that they both of them would willingly have offered him a suite of

apartments in the house, if he could have accepted such an offer.

Dangelis was particularly lucky in arriving at Nevilton at this especial moment. An abnormally retarded spring had led to the most delicious overlapping in the varied flora of the place. Though June had begun, there were still many flowers lingering in the shadier spots of the woods and ditches, which properly belonged not only to May, but to very early May. Certain, even, of April's progeny had not completely faded from the late-flowering lanes.

The artist found himself surrounded by a riotous revel of leafy exuberance. The year's "primal burst" had occurred, not in reluctant spasmodic fits and starts, as is usual in our intermittent fine weather, but in a grand universal outpouring of the earth's sap. His imagination answered spontaneously to this appeal, and his note-books were speedily filled with hurried passionate sketches, made at all hours of the long bright days, and full of suggestive charm. One particularly lovely afternoon the American found himself wandering slowly up the hill from the little Nevilton station, after a brief excursion to Yeoborough in search of pigments and canvas. He was hoping to take advantage of this auspicious stirring of his imaginative senses, by entering upon some more important and more continuous work. The Nevilton ladies had assured him that it would be quite impossible to find in the little town the kind of materials he needed; and he was returning in high spirits to assure them that he had completely falsified their prediction. He suspected Gladys of having invented this difficulty with a view to confining his labours to such easily

shared sketching-trips as she might accompany him upon, but though the fascination of the romping and toying girl still retained, and had even increased, its power over him; he was, in this case, impelled and driven by a force stronger and more dominant than any sensual attraction. He was in a better mood for painting than he had ever been in his life, and nothing could interfere with his resolution to exploit this mood to its utmost limit. With the most precious of his newly purchased materials under his arm and the more bulky ones promised him that same evening, Dangelis, as he drifted slowly up the sunny road chatting amicably with such rural marketers as overtook him, felt in a peculiarly harmonious temper.

He had recently, in the western cities of the States, won a certain fiercely contested notoriety in the art of portrait-painting, an art which he had come more and more to practise according to the very latest of those daring modern theories, which are summed up sometimes under the not very illuminative title of Post-impressionism, and he had, during the last few days, indulged in a natural and irresistible wish to associate this new departure with his personal experiences at Nevilton.

Gossiping nonchalantly with the village-wives, as he ascended the dusty road, by the vicarage wall, his thoughts ran swiftly over the motley-coloured map of his past life, and the deviating track across the world which he had been led to follow. He congratulated himself in his heart, as he indulged in easy persiflage with his fellow-wayfarers, upon his consistent freedom from everything that might choke or restrain the freedom of his will.

How fortunate, how incredibly fortunate, that he should, in weather like this, and in so abounding a mood of creative energy, be completely his own master, except for the need of propitiating two naive and amusing women! He entertained himself by the thought of how little they really knew him, — these friendly Romers — how little they sounded his real purposes, his essential feelings! To them no doubt, he was no more than he was to these excellent villagers, — a tall, fair, slouching, bony figure, with a face, — if they went as far as his face, — massively heavy and irregular, with dreamy humorous eyes and a mouth addicted to nervous twitching.

A clump of dandelions, obtruding their golden indifference to human drama, into the dust of the road at his feet, mixed oddly, at that moment, in these obscure workings of his brain, with a sort of savage caress of self-complacent congratulation which he suddenly bestowed on his interior self; as, beneath his pleasant chatter with his rural companions, he thought how imperturbable, how ferocious, his secret egoism was, and how well he concealed it under his indolent good-nature! He had passed now the entrance to the vicarage garden, and in the adjoining field he observed with a curious thrill of psychic sympathy the tenacious grip with which a viciously-knotted ash-tree held to the earth with its sturdy roots. Out-walked at last by all the other returned travellers, Dangelis glanced without pausing down the long Italianated avenue, at the end of which shone red, in the afternoon sun, the mullioned windows of the great house. He preferred to prolong his stroll, by taking the circuitous way, round by the

village. He knew the expression of that famous west front too well now, to linger in admiration over its picturesque repose in the afternoon sunshine. As a matter of fact a slight chill of curious antipathy crossed his consciousness as he quickened his steps.

Happily situated though he was, in his pleasant lodging beneath that capacious roof, the famous edifice itself had not altogether won his affection. The thing suggested to his wayward and prairie-nurtured soul, a stately product rather of convention than of life. He felt oddly conscious of it as something symbolic of what would be always intrinsically opposed to him, of what would willingly, if it were able, suppress him and render him helpless.

Dangelis belonged to quite a different type of trans-Atlantic visitor, from the kind that hover with exuberant delight over everything that is "old" or "English" or "European." He was essentially rather an artist than an antiquary, rather an energetic workman than an epicurean sentimentalist. Once out of sight of the Elizabethan pile, the curious chill passed from his mind, and as he approached the first cottages of the village he looked round for more reassuring tokens. Such tokens were not lacking. They crowded in upon him, indeed, from every side. Stopping for a moment, ere the houses actually blocked his view, and leaning over a gate which faced westward, Dangelis looked out across the great Somersetshire plain, to which Leo's Hill and Nevilton Mount serve the office of watchful sentinels. Tall, closely-clipped elm-trees, bordering every field, gave the country on this side of the horizon, a queer artificial look, as if it had been one huge landscape-

garden, arranged according to the arbitrary pleasure of some fantastic artist, whose perversion it was to reduce every natural extravagance to the meticulous rhythm of his own formal taste.

This impression, the impression of something willed and intentional in the very formation of Nature, gave our eccentric onlooker a caressing and delicate pleasure, a sense as of a thing peculiarly harmonious to his own spirit. The formality of Nevilton House depressed and chilled him, but the formality of age-trimmed trees and hedges liberated his imagination, as some perverse work of a Picasso or a Matisse might have done. He wondered vaguely to himself what was the precise cause of the psychic antipathy which rendered him so cold to the grandeur of Elizabethan architecture, while the other features of his present dwelling remained so attractive, and he came to the temporary solution, as he took his arms from the top of the gate, that it was because that particular kind of magnificence expressed the pride of a class, rather than of an individual, whereas he himself was all for individual self-assertion in everything — in everything! The problem was still teasing him, when, a few minutes later, he passed the graceful tower of St. Catharine's church.

This strangely organic, this curiously anonymous Gothic art — was not this also, the suppression of the individual, in the presence of something larger and deeper, of something that demanded the sacrifice of mere transient personality, as the very condition of its appearance? At all events it was less humiliating, less of an insult, to the claims of the individual will, when the thing was done in the inter-

est of religion, than when it was done in the interests of a class. The impersonality of the former, resembled the impersonality of rocks and flowers; that of the latter, the impersonality of fashions in dress.

"But away with them both!" muttered Dangelis to himself, as he strode viciously down the central street of Nevilton. The American was in very truth, and he felt he was, for all his artistic receptivity, an alien and a foreigner in the midst of these time-worn traditions. In spite of their beauty he knew himself profoundly opposed to them. They excited fibres of opposition and rebellion in him, that went down to the very depths of his nature. If, allowing full scope to our speculative fancy — and who knows upon what occult truths these wandering thoughts sometimes stumble? — we image the opposing "streams of tendency," in Nevilton village, as focussed and summed up, in the form of the Gothic church, guarded by the consecrated Mount, and the form of the Elizabethan house, owned by the owner of Leo's Hill, it is clear that this wanderer, from the shores of the Great Lakes, was equally antagonistic to both of them. He brought into the place a certain large and elemental indifference. To the child of the winds and storms of the Great Lakes, as, so one might think, to the high fixed stars themselves, this local strife of opposed mythologies must needs appear a matter of but trifling importance.

The American was not permitted, on this occasion, to pursue his meditations uninterrupted to the end of his walk. Half-way down the south drive he was overtaken by Gladys, returning from the village post-office. "Hullo! How have you got on?" she

cried. "I suppose you'll believe me another time? You know now, I expect, how impossible the Yeoborough shops are!"

"On the contrary," said the artist smiling, "I have found them extremely good. Perhaps I am less exacting," he added, "than some artists."

"I am exacting in everything," said Gladys, "especially in people. That is why I get on so well with you. You are a new experience to me."

Dangelis made no reply to this and they paced in silence under the tall exotic cedars until they reached the house.

"There's mother!" cried the girl, pushing open the door that led into the kitchen premises, and pulling the American unceremoniously in after her. They found Mrs. Romer before a large oak table, set in the mullioned window of the house-keeper's little room. She was arranging flowers for the evening's dinner-table. The plump lady welcomed Dangelis effusively and made him sit down upon a Queen Anne settle of polished mahogany which stood in the corner of the fire-place. Gladys remained standing, a tall softly-moulded figure, appealingly girlish in her light muslin frock. She swayed slightly, backwards and forwards, pouting capriciously at her mother's naive discourse, and loosening her belt with both her hands.

"Why should you ever go back to America?" Mrs. Romer was saying. "Don't go, dear Mr. Dangelis. Stay with us here till the end of the summer. The Red room in the south passage was getting quite damp before you came. Please, don't go! Gladys and I are getting so fond of you, so used to your ways and all that. Aren't we Gladys? Why should

you go? There are plenty of lovely bits of scenery about here. And you can have a studio built! Yes! Why not? Couldn't he, Gladys? The lumber-room in the south passage — opposite where Lily sleeps — would make a splendid place for painting in hot weather. I suppose a north light, though, would be impossible. But some kind of glass arrangement might be made. I must talk to Mortimer about it. I suppose you rich Americans think nothing of calling in builders and putting up studios. I suppose you do it everywhere. America must be full of north light. But perhaps something of the kind could be done. I really don't understand architecture, but Mortimer does. Mortimer understands everything. I daresay it wouldn't be very expensive. It would only mean buying the glass."

The admirable woman, whose large fair face and double chin had grown quite creased and shiny with excitement, turned at last to her daughter who had been coquettishly and dreamily staring at the smiling artist.

"Why don't you say something, Gladys? You don't want Mr. Dangelis to go, any more than I do, do you?"

The girl moved to the table and picking up a large peony stuck it wantonly and capriciously into her dress. "I have my confirmation lesson tonight," she said. "I must be at Mr. Clavering's by six. What's the time now?" She looked at the clock on the mantel-piece. "Why, its nearly half-past four! I wonder where Lacrima is. Never mind! We must have tea without her. I'm sure Mr. Dangelis is dying for tea. Let's have it out on the terrace."

"At six?" repeated Mrs. Romer. "I thought the class was always at seven. It was given out to be seven. I heard the notice on Sunday."

Gladys looked smilingly at the American as she answered her mother. "Don't be silly, dear. You know Mr. Clavering takes me separately from the others. The others are all village people."

Mrs. Romer rose from her seat with something between a sigh and a chuckle. "I hadn't the least idea," she said, "that he took you separately. You've been going to these classes for three weeks and you've never mentioned such a thing until this moment. Well — never mind! I expect Mr. Dangelis will not object to strolling down the drive with you. You'd better both get ready for tea now. I'll go and tell somebody we want it."

She had no sooner departed than Gladys began flicking the American, in playful childish sport, with a spray of early roses. He entered willingly into the game, and a pleasant tussle ensued between them as he sought to snatch the flowers out of her hands. She resisted but he pushed her backwards, and held her imprisoned against the edge of the table, teasing her as if she were a romping child of twelve.

"So you are going to these classes alone, are you?" he said. "I see that your English clergymen are allowed extraordinary privileges. I expect you cause him a good deal of agitation, poor dear man, if you flirt with him as shamelessly as you do with me. Well, go ahead! I'm not responsible for you. In fact I'm all for spurring you on. It'll amuse me to see what happens. But no doubt all sorts of things have happened already! I suppose you've made Mr.

Clavering desperately in love with you. I expect you persecute him unmercifully. I know you. I know your ways." He playfully pinched her arm. "But go on. It'll be an amusement to me to watch the result of all this. I like being a sort of sympathetic onlooker, in these things. I like the idea of hiding behind the scenes, and watching the tricks of a naughty little flirt like you, set upon troubling the mind of a poor harmless minister."

The reply made by the daughter of the House to this challenge was a simple but effective one. Like a mischievous infant caught in some unpardonable act, she flagrantly and shamelessly put out her tongue at him. Long afterwards, with curious feelings, Dangelis recalled this gesture. He associated it to the end of his life with the indefinable smell of cut flowers, with their stalks in water, and the pungency of peony-petals.

Tea, when it reached our friends upon the stately east terrace, proved a gay and festive meal. The absence of the reserved and nervous Italian, and also of the master of Nevilton, rendered all three persons more completely and freely at their ease, than they had ever been since the American's first appearance. The grass was being cut at that corner of the park, and the fresh delicious smell, full of the very sap of the earth, poured in upon them across the sunny flower beds. The chattering of young starlings, the cawing of young rooks, blended pleasantly with the swish of the scythes and the laughter of the hay-makers; and from the distant village floated softly to their ears all those vague and characteristic sounds which accompany the close of a hot day, and the

release from labour of men and beasts. As they devoured their bread and butter with that naive greediness which is part of the natural atmosphere of this privileged hour in an English home, the three friends indicated by their playful temper and gay discourse that they each had secret reasons for self-congratulation.

Dangelis felt an exquisite sense of new possibilities in his art, drawn from the seduction of these surroundings and the frank animalism of his cheerful companions. He sat between them, watching their looks and ways, very much as Rubens or Franz Hals might have watched the rounded bosoms and spacious gestures of two admirable burgess-women in some country house of Holland.

Mrs. Romer, below her garrulous chatter, nourished fantastic and rose-colored dreams, in which inestimable piles of dollars, and limitless rows of golden haired grand-children, played the predominant part. Gladys, flushed and excited, gave herself up to the imagined exercise of every sort of wanton and wilful power, with the desire for which the flowing sap of the year's exuberance filled her responsive veins.

Tea over, Dangelis suggested that he should accompany the girl to Mr. Clavering's door.

"You needn't be there for three quarters of an hour," he said, "let's go across to the mill copse first, and see if there are any blue-bells left."

Gladys willingly consented, and Susan Romer, remaining pensive in her low cane chair, watched their youthful figures retreating across the sunlit park with a sigh of profound thankfulness addressed vaguely and obscurely to Omnipotence. This was

indeed the sort of son-in-law she craved. How much more desirable than that reserved and haughty young Ilminster! Gladys would be, three times over, a fool if she let him escape.

A few minutes later the artist and his girl-friend reached the mill spinney. He helped her over the stream and the black-thorn hedge without too much damage to her frock and he was rewarded for his efforts by the thrill of vibrating pleasure with which she plunged her hands among the oozy stalks of those ineffable blue flowers.

"No wonder young Hyacinth was too beautiful to live," he remarked.

"Shut up!" was the young woman's reply, as she breathlessly stretched herself along the length of a fallen branch, and endeavoured to reach the damp moist stalks and cool leaves with her forehead and lips.

"How silly it is, having one's hair done up," she cried presently, raising herself on her hands from her prone position, and kicking the branch viciously with her foot.

"You'd have liked me with my hair down, Mr. Dangelis," she continued. "Lying like this," and she once more embraced the fallen bough, "it would have got mixed up with all those blue-bells and then you *would* have had something to paint!"

"Bad girl!" cried the artist playfully, switching her lightly with a willow wand from which he had been stripping the bark. "I would have made you do your hair up, tight round your head, years and years ago."

He offered her his hand and lifted her up. Once in possession of those ardent youthful fingers, he seemed

to consider himself justified in retaining them and, as the girl made no sign of dissent, they advanced hand in hand through the thick undergrowth.

The place was indeed a little epitome of the season's prolific growth. Above and about them, elder-bushes and hazels met in entangled profusion; while at their feet the marshy soil was covered with a mass of moss and cool-rooted leafy plants. Golden-green burdocks grew there, and dark dog-mercury; while mixed with aromatic water-mint and ground ivy, crowds of sturdy red campions lifted up their rose-coloured heads. The undergrowth was so thick, and the roots of the willows and alders so betraying, that over and over again he had to make a path for her, and hold back with his hand some threatening withy-switch or prickly thorn branch, that appeared likely to invade her face or body.

The indescribable charm of the hour, as the broken sunlight, almost horizontal now, threw red patches, like the blood of wounded satyrs, upon tree-trunks and mossy stumps, and made the little marsh-pools gleam as if filled with fairy wine, found its completest expression in the long-drawn flute-music, at the same time frivolously gay and exquisitely sad, of the blackbird's song. An angry cuckoo, crying its familiar cry as it flew, flapped away from some hidden perch, just above their heads.

Not many more black-bird's notes and not many more cuckoo's cries would that diminutive jungle hear, before the great mid-summer silence descended upon it, to be broken only by the less magical sounds of the later season. Nothing but the auspicious accident of the extreme lateness of the spring

had given to the visitor from Ohio these revelations of enchantment. It was one of those unequalled moments when the earth seems to breathe out from its most secret heart perfumes and scents that seem to belong to a more felicitous planet than our planet, murmurs and voices adapted to more responsive ears than our ears.

It was doubtless, so Dangelis thought, on such an evening as this, that the first notion of the presence in such places of beings of a finer and yet a grosser texture than man's, first entered the imagination of humanity. In such a spot were the earth-gods born.

Many feathered things, besides black-birds and cuckoos abounded in the mill spinney.

They had scarcely reached the opposite end of the little wood, when with a sudden cry of excitement and a quick sinking on her knees, the girl turned to him with a young thrush in her hand. It was big enough to be capable of flying and, as she held it in her soft white fingers, it struggled desperately and uttered little cries. She held it tightly in one hand, and with the other caressed its ruffled feathers, looking sideways at her companion, as she did so, with dreamy, half-shut, voluptuous eyes.

"Little darling," she whispered. And then, with a breathless gasp in her voice, — "Kiss its head, Mr. Dangelis. It can't get away." He stooped over her as she held the bird up to him, and if in obeying her he brushed with his lips fingers as well as feathers, the accident was not one he could bring himself to regret.

"It can't get away," she repeated, in a low soft murmur.

The bird did, however, get away, a moment afterwards, and went fluttering off through the brushwood, with that delicious, awkward violence, which young thrushes share with so many other youthful things.

In the deep ditch which they now had to cross, the artist caught sight of a solitary half-faded primrose, the very last, perhaps, of its delicate tribe. He showed it to Gladys, gently smoothing away, as he did so, the heavy leaves which seemed to be overshadowing its last days of life.

The girl pushed him aside impetuously, and plucking the faded flower deliberately thrust it into her mouth.

"I love eating them," she cried, "I used to do it when I was ever so little and I do it still when I am alone. You've no idea how nice they taste!"

At that moment they heard the sound of the church clock striking six.

"Quick!" cried Gladys. "Mr. Clavering will be waiting. He'll be cross if I'm too dreadfully late."

They emerged from the wood and followed the grass-grown lane, round by the small mill-pond. Crossing the park once more, they entered the village by the Yeoborough road.

"What a girl!" said Dangelis to himself, in a voice of unmitigated admiration, as he held open for her, at last, the little gate of the old vicarage garden, and waved his good-bye.

"What a girl! Heaven help that unfortunate Mr. Clavering! If he's as susceptible as most of these young Englishmen, she'll make havoc of his poor heart. Will he read the 'Imitation' with her, I wonder?"

He strolled slowly back, the way they had come, the personality of the insidious Gladys pressing less and less heavily upon him as his thought reverted to his painting. He resolved that he would throw all these recent impressions together in some large and sumptuous picture, that should give to these modern human figures something of the ample suggestion and noble aplomb, the secret of which seemed to have been lost to the world with the old Flemish and Venetian masters.

What in his soul he vaguely imaged as his task, was an attempt to eliminate all mystic and symbolic attitudes from his work, and to catch, in their place, if the inspiration came to him, something of the lavish prodigality, superbly material, and yet possessed of ineffable vistas, of the large careless evocations of nature herself.

His imaginative purpose, as it defined itself more and more clearly in his mind, during his solitary return through the evening light, seemed to imply an attempted reproduction of those aspects of the human drama, in such a place as this, which carried upon their surface the air of things that could not happen otherwise, and which, in their large inevitableness, over-brimmed and over-flowed all traditional distinctions. He would have liked to have given, in this way, to the figures of Gladys and her mother, something of the superb non-moral "insouciance," springing, like the movements of animals and the fragrance of plants, out of the bosom of an earth innocent of both introspection and renunciation, which one observes in the forms of Attic sculpture, or in the creations of Venetian colourists. Below the high

ornamental wall of Nevilton garden he paused a moment before entering the little postern-gate, to admire the indescribable greenness and luxuriousness of the heavy grass devoted in this place, not to hay-makers but to cattle. There was a sort of poetry, he humorously told himself, even about the great black heaps of cow-dung which alternated here with the golden clumps of drowsy buttercups. They also, — why not? — might be brought into the kind of picture he visioned, just as Veronese brought his mongrels and curs to the very feet of the Saviour!

Dangelis lifted his eyes, to where, through a gap in the leafy uplands, the more distant hills were visible. He could make out clearly, in the rich purple light, the long curving lines of the Corton downs, as they melted, little by little, in a floating lake of aerial blue-grey vapour, the exhalation of the great valley's day-long breathing.

He could even mark, at the end of the Corton range — and the sight of it gave him a thrilling sense of the invincible continuity of life in these regions — the famous tree-crested circle of Cadbury Camp, the authentic site of the Arthurian Camelot.

What a lodging this Nevilton was, to pass one's days in, to work in, and to love and dream! What enchantments were all around him! What memories! What dumb voices!

CHAPTER VIII

THE MYTHOLOGY OF SACRIFICE

JUNE, in Nevilton, that summer, seemed debarred by some strange interdiction from regaining its normal dampness and rainy discomfort.

It continued unnaturally hot and dry — so dry, that though the hay-harvest was still in full session, the farmers were growing seriously anxious and impatient for the long-delayed showers. It had been, as we have already noted, an unusual season. Not only were there so many blue-bells lingering in the shadowy places in the woods, but among the later flowers there were curious over-lappings.

The little milk-wort blossoms, for instance, on Leo's Hill, were overtaken, before they perished, by premature out-croppings of yellow trefoil and purple thyme.

The walnut-trees had still something left of their spring freshness, while in the hedges along the roads, covered, all of them, with a soft coating of thin white dust, the wild-roses and the feathery grasses suggested the heart of the year's prime.

It was about eight o'clock, in the evening of a day towards the end of the second week in this unusual month, that Mr. Hugh Clavering emerged from the entrance of the Old Vicarage with a concentrated and brooding expression. His heart was indeed rent and torn within him by opposite and contrary emotions. With one portion of his sensitive nature he

was craving desperately for the next day's interview with Gladys; with the other portion he was making firm and drastic resolutions to avoid it and escape from it. She was due to come to his house in the afternoon — less than twenty-four hours' time from this actual moment! But the more rigorous half of his being had formed the austere plan of sending her a note in the morning begging her to appear, along with the other candidates, at a later hour. He had written the note and it still remained, propped up against the little Arundel print of the Transfiguration, on the mantelpiece of his room.

He went up the street with bowed, absorbed head, hardly noticing the salutations of the easy loiterers gathered outside the door of the Goat and Boy, — the one of Nevilton's two taverns which just at present attracted the most custom. Passing between the tavern and the churchyard wall, he pushed open the gate leading into the priory farmyard, and striding hurriedly through it began the ascent of the grassy slope at the base of Nevilton Mount.

The wind had sunk with the sinking of the sun, and an immense quietness lay like a catafalque of sacred interposition on the fields and roofs and orchards of the valley. A delicious smell of new-mown grass blent itself with the heavy perfume of the great white blossoms of the elder bushes — held out, like so many consecrated chalices to catch the last drops of soft-lingering light, before it faded away.

Hugh Clavering went over the impending situation again and again; first from one point of view, then from another. The devil whispered to him — if it were the devil — that he had no right to sacrifice

his spiritual influence over this disconcerting pupil, out of a mere personal embarrassment. If he gave her her lesson along with the rest, all that special effort he had bestowed upon her thought, her reading, her understanding, might so easily be thrown away! She was different, obviously different, from the simple village maids, and to put her now, at this late hour, with the confirmation only a few weeks off, into the common class, would be to undo the work of several months. He could not alter his method with the others for her sake, and she would be forced to listen to teaching which to her would be elementary and platitudinous. He would be throwing her back in her spiritual development. He would be forcing her to return to the mere alphabet of theology at the moment when she had just begun to grow interested in its subtle and beautiful literature. She would no doubt be both bored and teased. Her nerves would be ruffled, her interest diminished, her curiosity dulled. She would be angry, too, at being treated exactly as were these rustic maidens — and anger was not a desirable attribute in a gentle catechumen.

Besides, her case was different from theirs on quite technical grounds. She was preparing for baptism as well as confirmation, and he, as her priest, was bound to make this, the most essential of all Christian sacraments, the head and front of his instruction. It was hardly to the point to say that the other girls knew quite as little of the importance of this sacred rite as she did. His explanations of it to them, his emphasis upon the blessing it had already been to them, would be necessarily too simple and childish for her quicker, maturer understanding.

As he reached the actual beginning of the woody eminence and turned for a moment to inhale the magical softness of the invading twilight, it occurred to him that from a logically ecclesiastical standpoint it was a monstrous thing that he should be serenely and coldly debating the cutting off of his spiritual assistance from this poor thirsty flower of the heathen desert. She was unbaptized — and to be unbaptized, according to true doctrine, meant, with all our Christian opportunities, a definite peril, a grave and assured peril, to her immortal soul. Who was he that he should play with such a formidable risk — such a risk to such a lamb of the Great Shepherd? It was quite probable — he knew it was probable — that, angry with him for deserting her so causelessly and unreasonably, she would refuse to go further in the sacred business. She would say, and say justly, that since the affair seemed of so little importance to him she would make it of little importance to herself. Suppose he were to call in some colleague from Yeoborough, and make over this too exciting neophyte to some other pastor of souls — would she agree to such a casual transference? He knew well enough that she would not.

How unfortunate it was that the peculiar constitution of his English Church made these things so difficult! The individual personality of the priest mattered so much in Anglican circles! The nobler self in him envied bitterly at that moment the stricter and yet more malleable organization of the Mother Church. How easy it would be were he a Roman priest. A word to his superior in office, and all would arrange itself! It was impossible to imagine

himself speaking such a word to the Right Reverend the Bishop of Glastonbury. The mere idea of such a thing, in our England of discreet propriety, made him smile in the midst of his distress.

The thought of the Roman Church brought into his mind the plausible figure of Mr. Taxater. How that profound and subtle humanist would chuckle over his present dilemma! He would probably regard it as a proper and ironical punishment upon him for his heretical assumption of this traditional office.

Tradition! That was the thing. Tradition and organization. After all, it was only to Hugh Clavering, as a nameless impersonal priest of God, that this lovely outcast lamb came begging to be enfolded. He had no right to dally with the question at all. There *was* no question. As the priest of Nevilton it was his clear pastoral duty to give every possible spiritual assistance to every person in his flock. What if the pursuit of this duty did throw temptation — intolerable temptation — in his way? His business was not to try and escape from such a struggle; but to face it, to wrestle with it, to overcome it! He was like a sentinel at his post in a great war. Was he to leave his post and retreat to the rear because the shells were bursting so thickly round him?

He sat down on the grass with his back to an ancient thorn-tree and gazed upon the tower of his beloved church. Would he not be false to that Church — false to his vows of ordination — if he were now to draw back from the firing-line of the battle and give up the struggle by a cowardly retreat? Even supposing the temptation were more than he

could endure — even supposing that he fell — would not God prefer his suffering such a fall with his face to the foe, sword in hand, rather than that he should be saved, his consecrated weapon dropped from his fingers, in squalid ignoble flight?

So much for the arguments whispered in his ear by the angel of darkness! But he had lately been visited by another angel — surely not of darkness — and he recalled the plausible reasonings of the great champion of the papacy, as he sat in that pleasant window sipping his wine. Why should he agitate himself so furiously over this little matter? After all, why not enjoy the pleasure of this exquisite being's society? He was in no danger of doing her any harm — he knew Gladys at least well enough by now to know that! — and what harm could she do him? There was no harm in being attracted irresistibly to something so surpassingly attractive! Suppose he fell really in love with her? Well! There was no religious rule — certainly none in the church he belonged to — against falling in love with a lovable and desirable girl. But it was not a matter of falling in love. He knew that well enough. There was very little of the romantic or the sentimental about the feelings she aroused in him. It was just a simple, sensuous, amorous attraction to a provocative and alluring daughter of Eve. Just a simple sensuous attraction — so simple, so natural, as to be almost "innocent," as Mr. Taxater would put it.

So he argued with himself; but the Tower of the Church opposite seemed to invade the mists of these subtle reasonings with a stern emphasis of clear-cut protest. He knew well enough that his peculiar

nature was not of the kind that might be called "sensuous" or "amorous," but of quite a different sort. The feelings that had lately been excited in him were as concentrated and passionate as his feelings for the altar he served. They were indeed a sort of temporal inversion of this sacred ardour; or, as the cynical Mr. Quincunx in his blunt manner would have expressed it, this sacred fire itself was only a form taken by the more earthly flame. But a "flame" it was, — not any gentle toying with soft sensation, — a flame, a madness, a vice, an obsession.

In no ideal sense could he be said to be "in love" with Gladys. He was intoxicated with her. His senses craved for her as they might have craved for some sort of maddening drug. In his heart of hearts he knew well that the emotion he felt was closely allied to a curious kind of antagonism. He thought of her with little tenderness, with no gentle, responsible consideration. Her warm insidious charm maddened and perturbed him. It did not diffuse itself through his senses like a tender fragrance. It provoked, disturbed, and tantalized. She was no Rose of Sharon, to be worshipped forever. She was a Rose of Shiraz, to be seized, pressed against his face, and flung aside! The appeal she made to him was an appeal to what was perverse, vicious, dangerous devastating, in his nature. To call his attraction to her beauty "innocent" — in Mr. Taxater's phrase — was a mere hypocritical white-washing of the brutal fact.

His mind, in its whirling agitation, conjured up the image of himself as married to her, as legally and absolutely possessed of her. The image was like fuel to

his flame, but it brought no solution of the problem. Marriage, though permitted by his church, was as directly contrary to his own interpretation of his duty as a priest, as any mortal sin might be. To him it would have been a mortal sin — the betrayal of his profoundest ideal. In the perversity — if you will — of his ecclesiastical conscience, he felt towards such a solution the feeling a man might have if the selling of his soul were to be a thing transacted in cold blood, rather than in the tempest of the moment. To marry Gladys would be to summon the very sacraments of his church to bless with a blasphemous consecration his treachery to their appeal.

Rent and torn by all these conflicting thoughts, the poor clergyman scrambled once more to his feet, pushed his way recklessly through the intervening fence, and began ascending the steep side of the pyramidal hill. As he struggled upward, through burdocks, nettles, tall grasses, red-campion, and newly planted firs, his soul felt within him as if it were something fleeing from an invincible pursuer. The rank aromatic smell of torn elder-boughs and the pungent odour of trodden ground-ivy filled his nostrils. His clothes were sprinkled with feathery seed-dust. Closely-sticking burs clung to his legs and arms. Outstretched branches switched his face with their leaves. His feet stumbled over young fern-fronds, bent earthwards in their elaborate unsheathing.

He vaguely associated with his thoughts, as he struggled on, certain queer purple markings which he noticed on the stalks of the thickly-grown hemlocks, and the bind-weed, which entwined itself round many of the slenderer tree-stems, became a symbol

of the power that assailed him. To escape — to be free! This was the burden of his soul's crying as he plunged forward through all these dim leafy obstructions.

Gradually, as he drew nearer the hill's summit, there formed in his mind the only real sanctuary of refuge, the only genuine deliverance. He must obey his innate conscience; and let the result be as God willed. At all costs he must shake himself clear of this hot, sweet, luscious bind-weed, that was choking the growth of his soul. His own soul — that, after all, was his first care, his predominant concern. To keep *that*, pure and undefiled, and let all else go! Confused by the subtle arguments of the serpent, he would cling only the more passionately to the actual figure of the God-Man, and obey his profound command in its literal simplicity. Ecclesiastical casuistry might say what it pleased about the danger he plunged Gladys into, in thus neglecting her. The matter had gone deeper than casuistry, deeper, far deeper, than points of doctrine. It had become a direct personal struggle between his own soul and Satan; a struggle in which, as he well knew, the only victory lay in flight. On other fields he might be commanded by his celestial Captain to hold his post to the last; but in the arena of this temptation, to hold the field was to desert the field; to escape from it, to win it.

He paused breathlessly under a clump of larches, and stretching out his arms, seized — like Samson in the temple of Dagon — two of the slender-growing trunks. "Let all this insidious growth of Nature," he thought, "all this teeming and prolific exuberance

of godless life, be thrust into oblivion, as long as the great translunar Secret be kept inviolable!" Exhausted by the struggle within him he sank down in the green twilight of that leafy security, and crossed his hands over his knees. Through a gap in the foliage he could perceive the valley below; he could even perceive the outline of the roof of Nevilton House. But against the magic of those carved pinnacles he had found a counter-charm. In the hushed stillness about him, he seemed conscious of the power of all these entangled growing things as a sinister heathen influence pulling him earthward.

Men differ curiously from one another in this respect. To some among them the influences of what we call Nature are in harmony with all that is good in them, and have a soothing and mystical effect. Others seem to disentangle themselves from every natural surrounding, and to stand out, against the background of their own spiritual horizons, clear-edged, opaque, and resistant.

Clavering was entirely of this latter type. Nature to him was always full of hidden dangers and secret perils. He found her power a magical, not a mystical, one. He resented the spell she cast over him. It seemed to lend itself, all too willingly, to the vicious demons that delighted to waylay his unguarded hours. His instinctive attitude to these enchanting natural forces was that of a mediæval monk. Their bewitching shapes, their lovely colours, their penetrating odours, were all permeated for him by a subtle diffusion of something evil there; something capable of leading one's spirit desperately, miserably far — if one allowed it the smallest welcome. Against all these

siren-voices rumouring and whispering so treacherously around us, against all this shifting and flitting wizardry, one defence alone availed; — the clear-cut, absolute authority of Him who makes the clouds his chariot and the earth his footstool.

As Clavering sat crouching there under his tent of larches, the spirit of the Christ he served seemed to pass surging through him like a passionate flood. He drew deep breaths of exquisite relief and comfort. The problem was solved, — was indeed no problem at all; for he had nothing to do but to obey the absolute authority, the soul-piercing word. Who was he to question results? The same God who commanded him to flee from temptation was able — beyond the mystery of his own divine method — to save her who tempted him, whether baptized or unbaptized!

He leapt to his feet, and no more like one pursued, but rather like one pursuing, pushed his way to the summit of the Mount. The space at the top was flat and circular; not unlike, in its smooth level surface, the top of the mountain in that very Transfiguration picture which was now overshadowing his letter to his enchantress. In the centre of this open space rose the thin Thyrsus-shaped tower. He advanced to the eastern edge of the hill and looked down over the wide-spread landscape.

The flat elm-fringed meadows of the great mid-Somerset plain stretched softly away, till they lost themselves in a purple mist. Never had the formidable outline of the Leonian promontory looked more emphatic and sinister than it looked in this deepening twilight. The sky above it was of a pale green tint,

flecked here and there by feathery streaks of carmine. The whole sky-dome was still lit by the pallid reflection of the dead sunset; and on the far northern horizon, where the Mendip hills rise above the plain, a livid whitish glimmer touched the rim of an enormous range of sombre clouds.

The priest stood, hushed, and motionless as a statue, contemplating this suggestive panorama. But little of its transparent beauty passed the surface of his consciousness. He was absorbed, rapt, intent. But the cause of his abstraction was not the diaphanous air-spaces above him or the dark earth beneath him; it was the pouring of the waves of divine love through his inmost being; it was his fusion with that great Spirit of the Beyond which renders its votaries independent of space and time.

After long exquisite moments of this high exultation, his mind gradually resumed its normal functioning. A cynical interpreter of this sublime experience would doubtless have attributed the whole phenomenon to a natural reaction of the priest, back to his habitual moral temper, from the turbulent perturbations of the recent days. Would such a one have found it a mere coincidence that at the moment of regaining his natural vision the clergyman's attention was arrested by the slow passage of a huge white cloud towards the Leonian promontory, a cloud that assumed, as it moved, gigantic and almost human lineaments?

Coincidence or not, Clavering's attention was not allowed to remain fixed upon this interesting spectacle. It seemed as though his return to ordinary human consciousness was destined to be attended by the

reappearance of ordinary humanity. He perceived in the great sloping field on the eastern side of the mount the white figure of a woman, walking alone. For the moment his heart stood still; but a second glance reassured him. He knew that figure, even in the dying light. It was little Vennie Seldom. Simultaneously with this discovery he was suddenly aware that he was no longer the only frequenter of the woody solitudes of Nevilton Hill. On a sort of terrace, about a hundred yards below him, there suddenly moved into sight a boy and a girl, walking closely interlinked and whispering softly. Acting mechanically, and as if impelled by an impulse from an external power, he sank down upon his knees and spied upon them. They too slipped into a semi-recumbent posture, apparently upon the branches of a fallen tree, and proceeded, in blissful unconsciousness of any spectator, to indulge in a long and passionate embrace. From where he crouched Clavering could actually discern these innocents' kisses, and catch the little pathetic murmurings of their amorous happiness. His heart beat wildly and strangely. In his fingers he clutched great handfuls of earth. His thoughts played him satyrish and fantastic tricks. Suddenly he leapt to his feet and stumbled away, like an animal that has been wounded. He encountered the Thyrsus-shaped tower — that queer fancy of eighteenth century leisure — and beat with his hands upon its hard smooth surface. After a second or two, however, he recovered his self-control; and to afford some excuse to his own mind for his mad behaviour, he walked deliberately round the edifice, looking for its entrance. This he presently found,

and stood observing it, with scowling interest, in the growing darkness. He had recognized the lovers down there. They were both youngsters of his parish. He made a detached mental resolve to talk tomorrow to the girl's mother. These flirtations during the hay-harvest often led to trouble.

There was just enough light left for him to remark some obscure lettering above the little locked door of this fanciful erection. It annoyed him that he could not read it. With trembling hand he fumbled in his pocket — produced a match-box and lit a match. There was no difficulty now in reading what it had been the humour of some eighteenth century Seldom to have carved on this site of the discovery of the Holy Rood. "Carpe Diem" he spelt out, before the flutterings of an agitated moth extinguished the light he held. This then was the oracle he had climbed the sacred Mount to hear!

With quick steps, steps over which his mind seemed no longer to have control, he returned to his point of observation. The boy and girl had disappeared, but Vennie Seldom was still visible in her white dress, pacing up and down the meadow. What was she doing there? — he wondered. Did she often slip away, after the little formal dinner with her mother, and wander at large through the evening shadows? An unaccountable rage against her beseiged his heart. He felt he should soon begin to hate her if he watched her much longer; so, with a more collected and calm step and a sigh that rose from the depths of his soul he moved away to where the path descended.

As it happened, however, the path he had to follow now, for it was too dark to return as he had come,

emerged, after many windings round the circle of the hill, precisely into the very field, in which Vennie was walking. He moved straight towards her. She gave a little start when she saw him, but waited passively, in that patient drooping pose so natural to her, till he was by her side.

"You too," she said, touching his hand, "feel the necessity of being alone a little while before the day ends. I always do. Mother sometimes protests. But it is no good. There are certain little pleasures that we have a right to enjoy — haven't we?"

They moved together along the base of the hill following its circuit in the northerly direction. Clavering felt as though, after a backward plunge into the Inferno, he had encountered a reproachful angel of light. He half expected her to say to him, in the crushing austerity of Beatrice, "Lift up your chin and answer me face to face." The gentle power of her pure spirit over him was so persuasive that in the after-ebb of this second turbulent reaction he could not refrain from striking the confessional note.

"I wish I were as good as you, Miss Seldom," he said. "I fear the power of evil in me goes beyond anything you could possibly conceive."

"There are few things I cannot conceive, Mr. Clavering," the girl answered, with that helpless droop of her little head that had so winning a pathos. "We people who live such secluded lives are not as ignorant of the great storms as you may imagine."

Clavering's voice shook as he responded to this.

"I wish I could talk quite freely to you. This convention that forbids friends such as we are from

being frank with one another, seems to me sometimes an invention of the devil."

The girl lifted her head. He could not see in the darkness that had now fallen upon them, how her mouth quivered and her cheeks grew scarlet.

"I think I can guess at what is worrying you, my friend," she murmured gently.

He trembled from head to foot with a curious shame. "You think it is about Gladys Romer," he burst out. "Well it is! I find her one of the greatest difficulties I have ever had in my life."

"I am afraid," said Vennie timidly, "she intends to be a difficulty to you. It is wrong to say so, but I have always been suspicious of her motives in this desire to enter our church,"

"God knows what her motives are!" sighed the priest, "I only know she makes it as hard for me as she can."

As soon as he had uttered these words a queer observing sense of having been treacherous to Gladys rose in his heart. Once more he had to suppress an emotion of hatred for the little saint by his side.

"I know," murmured Vennie, "I know. She tries to play upon your good-nature. She tries to make you over-fond of her. I suppose" — she paused for a moment — "I suppose she is like that. It is not her fault. It is her — her character. She has a mad craving for admiration and is ready to play it off on anybody."

"It makes it very difficult to help her," said the priest evasively.

Vennie peered anxiously at his face. "It is not as though she really was fond of *you*," she boldly added.

"I doubt whether she is fond of anyone. She loves troubling people's minds and making them unhappy."

"Don't mistake me, Miss Seldom," cried Clavering. "I am not in the least sentimental about her — it is only — only" — Vennie smoothed his path for him.

"It is only that she makes it impossible for you to teach her," she hazarded, following his lead. "I know something of that difficulty myself. These wayward pleasure-loving people make it very hard for us all sometimes."

Mr. Clavering shook his stick defiantly into the darkness, whether as a movement directed against the powers of evil or against the powers of good, he would himself have found it hard to say. Queer thoughts of a humorous frivolity passed through his mind. Something in the girl's grave tone had an irritating effect upon him. It is always a little annoying, even to the best of men, to feel themselves being guided and directed by women, unless they are in love with them. Clavering was certainly not in love with Vennie; and though in his emotional agitation he had gone so far in confiding in her, he was by no means unconscious of something incongruous and even ridiculous in the situation. This queer new frivolity in him, which now peered forth from some twisted corner of his nature, like a rat out of a hole, found this whole interview intolerably absurd. He suddenly experienced the sensation of being led along at Vennie's side like a convicted school-boy. He found himself rebelling against all women in his heart, both good and bad, and recalling, humorously and sadly, the old sweet scandalous attitude of contempt for the whole sex, of his irresponsible Cambridge days.

Perhaps, dimly and unconsciously, he was reacting now, after all this interval, to the subtle influence of Mr. Taxater. He knew perfectly well that the very idea of a man — not to speak of a priest — confiding his amorous weaknesses to a woman, would have excited that epicurean sage to voluble fury. Everything that was mediæval and monkish in him rose up too, in support of this interior outburst of Rabelaisean spleen.

It would be interesting to know if Vennie had any inkling, as she walked in the darkness by his side, of this new and unexpected veering of his mood. Certainly she refrained from pressing him for any further confessions. Perhaps with the genuine clairvoyance of a saint she was conscious of her danger. At any rate she began speaking to him of herself, of her difficulties with her mother and her mother's friends, of her desire to be of more use to Lacrima Traffio, and of the obstacles in the way of that.

Conversing with friendly familiarity on these less poignant topics they arrived at last at the gates of the Priory farm and the entrance to the church. Mr. Clavering was proceeding to escort her home, when she suddenly stopped in the road, and said in a quick hurried whisper, "I should dearly love to walk once round the churchyard before I go back."

The cheerful light from the windows of the Goat and Boy showed, as it shone upon his face, his surprise as well as his disinclination. The truth is, that by a subtle reversion of logic he had now reached the idea that it was at once absurd and unkind to send that letter to Gladys. He was trembling to tear it in pieces, and burn the pieces in his kitchen-

fire! Vennie however, did not look at his face. She looked at the solemn tower of St. Catharine's church.

"Please get the key," she said, "and let us walk once round."

He was compelled to obey her, and knocking at the door of the clerk's cottage aroused that astonished and scandalized official into throwing the object required out of his bedroom window. Once inside the churchyard however, the strange and mystical power of the spot brought his mood into nearer conformity with his companion's.

They stopped, as everyone who visits Nevilton churchyard is induced to stop, before the extraordinary tomb of Gideon and Naomi Andersen. The thing had been constructed from the eccentric old carver's own design, and had proved one of the keenest pleasures of his last hours.

Like the whimsical poet Donne, he had derived a sardonic and not altogether holy delight in contemplating before his end the actual slab of earthly consistence that was to make his bodily resurrection so emphatically miraculous. Clavering and Vennie stood for several minutes in mute contemplation before this strange monument. It was composed of a huge, solid block of Leonian stone, carved at the top into the likeness of an enormous human skull, and ornamented, below the skull, by a deeply cut cross surrounded by a circle. This last addition gave to the sacred symbol within it a certain heathen and ungodly look, making it seem as though it were no cross at all, but a pagan hieroglyph from some remote unconsecrated antiquity. The girl laid her fragile hand on the monstrous image

of death, which the gloom around them made all the more threatening.

"It is wonderful," she said, "how the power of Christ can change even the darkest objects into beauty. I like to think of Him striking His hand straight through the clumsy half-laws of Man and Nature, and holding out to us the promise of things far beyond all this morbid dissolution."

"You are right, my friend," answered the priest.

"I think the world is really a dark and dreadful place," she went on. "I cannot help saying so. I know there are people who only see its beauty and joy. I cannot feel like that. If it wasn't for Him I should be utterly miserable. I think I should go mad. There is too much unhappiness — too much to be borne! But this strong hand of His, struck clean down to us from outside the whole wretched confusion, — I cling to that; and it saves me. I know there are lots of happy people, but I cannot forget the others! I think of them in the night. I think of them always. They are so many — so many!"

"Dear child!" murmured the priest, his interlude of casual frivolity melting away like mist under the flame of her conviction.

"Do you think," she continued, "that if we were able to hear the weeping of all those who suffer and have suffered since the beginning of the world, we could endure the idea of going on living? It would be too much! The burden of those tears would darken the sun and hide the moon. It is only His presence in the midst of us, — His presence, coming in from outside, that makes it possible for us to endure and have patience."

"Yes, He must come in from *outside*," murmured the priest, "or He cannot help us. He must be able to break every law and custom and rule of nature and man. He must strike at the whole miserable entanglement from outside it — from outside it!"

Clavering's voice rose almost to a shout as he uttered these last words. He felt as though he were refuting in one tremendous cry of passionate certainty all those "modernistic" theories with which he loved sometimes to play. He was completely under Vennie's influence now.

"And we must help Him," said the girl, "by entering into His Sacrifice. Only by sacrifice — by the sacrifice of everything — can we enable Him to work the miracle which He would accomplish!"

Clavering could do nothing but echo her words.

"The sacrifice of everything," he whispered, and abstractedly laid *his* hand upon the image of death carved by the old artist. Moved apparently by an unexpected impulse, Vennie seized, with her own, the hand thus extended.

"I have thought," she cried, "of a way out of your difficulty. Give her her lessons in the church! That will not hurt her feelings, and it will save you. It will prevent her from distracting your mind, and it will concentrate her attention upon your teaching. It will save you both!"

Clavering held the little hand, thus innocently given him, tenderly and solemnly in both of his.

"You are right, my friend," he said, and then, gravely and emphatically as if repeating a vow, — "I will take her in the church. That will settle everything."

Vennie seemed thrilled with spiritual joy at his acquiescence in her happy inspiration. She walked so rapidly as they recrossed the churchyard that he could hardly keep pace with her. She seemed to long to escape, to the solitude of her own home, of her own room, in order to give full vent to her feelings. He locked the gate of the porch behind them, and put the key in his pocket. Very quickly and in complete silence they made their way up the road to the entrance of the vicarage garden.

Here they separated, with one more significant and solemn hand-clasp. It was as if the spirit of St. Catharine herself was in the girl, so ethereal did she look, so transported by unearthly emotion, as the gate swung behind her.

As for the vicar of Nevilton, he strode back impetuously to his own house, and there, from its place beneath the print of the transfiguration, he took the letter, and tore it into many pieces; but he tore it with a different intention from that which, an hour before, had ruled his brain; and the sleep which awaited him, as soon as his head touched his pillow, was the soundest and sweetest he had known since first he came to the village.

CHAPTER IX

THE MYTHOLOGY OF POWER

IT was late in the afternoon of the day following the events just described. Mrs. Fringe was passing in and out of Clavering's sitting-room making the removal of his tea an opportunity for interminable discourse.

"They say Eliza Wotnot's had a bad week of it with one thing and another. They say she be as yellow as a lemon-pip in her body, as you might call it, and grey as ash-heaps in her old face. I never cared for the woman myself, and I don't gather as she was desperate liked in the village, but a Christian's a Christian when they be laid low in the Lord's pleasure, though they be as surly-tongued as Satan."

"I know, I know," said the clergyman impatiently.

"They say Mr. Taxater sits up with her night after night as if he was a trained nurse. Why he don't have a nurse I can't think, 'cept it be some papist practice. The poor gentleman will be getting woeful thin, if this goes on. He's not one for losing his sleep and his regular meals."

"Sally Birch is doing all that for him, Mrs. Fringe," said Clavering. "I have seen to it myself."

"Sally Birch knows as much about cooking a gentleman's meals as my Lottie, and that's not saying a great deal."

"Thank you, Mrs. Fringe, thank you," said Clavering. "You need not move the table."

"Oh, of course, 'tis Miss Gladys' lesson-day. They say she's given young Mr. Ilminster the go-by, sir. 'Tis strange and wonderful how some people be made by the holy Lord to have their whole blessed pleasure in this world. Providence do love the ones as loves themselves, and those that seeks what they want shall find it! I expect, between ourselves, sir, the young lady have got someone else in her eye. They tell me some great thundering swell from London is staying in the House."

"That'll do, Mrs. Fringe, that'll do. You can leave those flowers a little longer."

"I ought to let you know, sir, that old Jimmy Pringle has gone off wandering again. I saw Witch-Bessie at his door when I went to the shop this morning and she told me he was talking and talking, as badly as ever he did. Far gone, poor old sinner, Witch-Bessie said he was."

"He is a religious minded man, I believe, at bottom," said the clergyman.

"He be stark mad, sir, if that's what you mean! As to the rest, they say his carryings on with that harlotry down in Yeoborough was a disgrace to a Christian country."

"I know," said Clavering, "I know, but we all have our temptations, Mrs. Fringe."

"Temptations, sir?" and the sandy complexioned female snorted with contempt. "And is those as takes no drop of liquor, and looks at no man edgeways, though their own lawful partner be a stiff corpse of seven years' burying, to be put in the

same class with them as goes rampaging with harlotries?"

"He has repented, Mrs. Fringe, he has repented. He told me so himself when I met him last week."

"Repented!" groaned the indignant woman; "he repents well who repents when he can't sin no more. His talk, if you ask me, sir, is more scandalous than religious. Witch-Bessie told me she heard him say that he had seen the Lord Himself. I am not a learned scholar like you, sir, but I know this, that when the Lord does go about the earth he doesn't visit hoary old villains like Jimmy Pringle — except to tell them they be damned."

"Did he really say that?" asked the clergyman, feeling a growing interest in Mr. Pringle's revelations.

"Yes, sir, he did, sir! Said he met God, — those were his very words, and indecent enough words I call them! — out along by Captain Whiffley's drive-gate. You should have heard Witch-Bessie tell me. He frightened her, he did, the wicked old man! God, he said, came to him, as I might come to you, sir, quite ordinary and familiar-like. 'Jimmy,' said God, all sudden, as if he were a person passing the time of day, 'I have come to see you, Jimmy.'

"'And who may you be, Mister?' said the wicked old man, just as though the Lord above were a casual decent-dressed gentleman.

"'I am God, Jimmy,' said the Vision. 'And I be come to tell 'ee how dearly I loves 'ee, spite of Satan and all his works.' Witch-Bessie told me," Mrs. Fringe continued, "how as the old man said things to her as she never thought to hear from human lips, so dreadful they were."

"And what happened then?" asked Clavering eagerly.

"What happened then? Why God went away, he said, in a great cloud of roaring fire, and he was left alone, all dazed-like. Did you ever hear such a scimble-scamble story in your life, sir? And all by Captain Whiffley's drive-gate!"

"Well, Mrs. Fringe," said the clergyman, "I think we must postpone the rest of this interesting conversation till supper-time. I have several things I want to do."

"I know you have, sir, I know you have. It isn't easy to find out from all them books ways and means of keeping young ladies like Miss Gladys in the path of salvation. How does she get on, sir, if I might be so bold? I fear she don't learn her catechism as quiet and patient as I used to learn mine, under old Mr. Ravelin, God forgive him!"

"Oh, I think Miss Romer is quite as good a pupil as you used to be, Mrs. Fringe," said Clavering, rising and gently ushering her out of the door.

"She's as good as some of these new-fangled village hussies, anyway," retorted the irrepressible lady, turning on the threshold. "They tell me that Lucy Vare was off again last night with that rascally Tom Mooring. She'll be in trouble, that young girl, before she wants to be."

"I know, I know," sighed the clergyman sadly, fumbling with the door handle.

"You don't know all you *ought* to know, sir, if you'll pardon my boldness," returned the woman, making a step backwards.

"I know, because I saw them!" shouted Clavering, closing the door with irritable violence.

"Goodness me!" muttered Mrs. Fringe, returning to her kitchen, "if the poor young man knew what this parish was really like, he wouldn't talk so freely about 'seeing' people!"

Left to himself, Clavering moved uneasily round his room, taking down first one book and then another, and looking anxiously at his shelves as if seeking something from them more efficient than eloquent words.

"As soon as she comes," he said to himself, "I shall take her across to the church."

He had not long to wait. The door at the end of the garden-path clicked. Light-tripping steps followed, and Gladys Romer's well-known figure made itself visible through the open window. He hastened out to meet her, hoping to forestall the hospitable Mrs. Fringe. In this, however, he was unsuccessful. His house-keeper was already in the porch, taking from the girl her parasol and gloves. How these little things, these chance-thrown little things, always intervene between our good resolutions and their accomplishment! He ought to have been ready in his garden, on the watch for her. Surely he had not intentionally remained in his room? No, it was the fault of Mrs. Fringe; of Mrs. Fringe and her stories about Jimmy Pringle and God. He wished that "a roaring cloud of fire" would rise between him and this voluptuous temptress. But probably, priest though he was, he lacked the faith of that ancient reprobate. He stood aside to let her enter. The words "I think it would be better if we went over

to the church," stuck, unuttered, to the roof of his mouth. She held out her white ungloved hand, and then, as soon as the door was closed, began very deliberately removing her hat.

He stood before her smiling, that rather inept smile, which indicates the complete paralysis of every faculty, except the faculty of admiration. He could hardly now suggest a move to the church. He could not trouble her to re-assume that charming hat. Besides, what reason could he give? He did, however, give a somewhat ambiguous reason for following out Vennie's heroic plan on another — a different — occasion. In the tone we use when allaying the pricks of conscience by tacitly treating that sacred monitor as if its intelligence were of an inferior order: "One of these days," he said, "we must have our lesson in the church. It would be so nice and cool there, wouldn't it?"

There was a scent of burning weeds in the front-room of the old vicarage, when master and neophyte sat down together, at the round oak table, before the extended works of Pusey and Newman. Sombre were the bindings of these repositories of orthodoxy, but the pleasant afternoon sun streamed wantonly over them and illumined their gloom.

Gladys had seated herself so that the light fell caressingly upon her yellow hair and deepened into exquisite attractiveness the soft shadows of her throat and neck. Her arms were sleeveless; and as she leaned them against the table, their whiteness and roundness were enhanced by the warm glow.

The priest spoke in a low monotonous voice, explaining doctrines, elucidating mysteries, and em-

phasizing moral lessons. He spoke of baptism. He described the manner in which the Church had appropriated to her own purpose so many ancient pagan customs. He showed how the immemorial heathen usages of "immersion" and "ablution" had become, in her hands, wonderful and suggestive symbols of the purifying power of the nobler elements. He used words that he had come, by frequent repetition, to know by heart. In order that he might point out to her passages in his authors which lent themselves to the subject, he brought his chair round to her side.

The sound of her gentle breathing, and the terrible attraction of her whole figure, as she leant forward, in sweet girlish attention to what he was saying, maddened the poor priest.

In her secret heart Gladys hardly understood a single word. The phrase "immersion," whenever it occurred, gave her an irresistible desire to laugh. She could not help thinking of her favourite round pond. The pond set her thinking of Lacrima and how amusing it was to frighten her. But this lesson with the young clergyman was even more amusing. She felt instinctively that it was upon herself his attention rested, whatever mysterious words might pass his lips.

Once, as they were leaning together over the "Development of Christian Doctrine," and he was enlarging upon the gradual evolution of one sacred implication after another, she let her arm slide lightly over the back of his hand; and a savage thrill of triumph rose in her heart, as she felt an answering magnetic shiver run through his whole frame.

"The worship of the Body of our Saviour," he said — using his own words as a shield against her — "allows no subterfuges, no reserves. It gathers to itself, as it sweeps down the ages, every emotion, every ardour, every passion of man. It appropriates all that is noble in these things to its own high purpose, and it makes even of the evil in them a means to yet more subtle good."

As he spoke, with an imperceptible gesture of liberation he rose from his seat by her side and set himself to pace the room. The struggle he was making caused his fingers to clench and re-clench themselves in the palms of his hands, as though he were squeezing the perfume from handfuls of scented leaves.

The high-spirited girl knew by instinct the suffering she was causing, but she did not yield to any ridiculous pity. She only felt the necessity of holding him yet more firmly. So she too rose from her chair, and, slipping softly to the window, seated herself sideways upon its ledge. Balanced charmingly here — like some wood-nymph stolen from the forest to tease the solitude of some luckless hermit — she stretched one arm out of the window, and pulling towards her a delicate branch of yellow roses, pressed it against her breast.

The pose of her figure, as she balanced herself thus, was one of provoking attractiveness, and with a furtive look of feline patience in her half-shut eyes she waited while it threw its spell over him.

The scent of burning weeds floated into the room. Clavering's thoughts whirled to and fro in his head like whipped chaff. "I must go on speaking," he

thought; "and I must not look at her. If I look at her I am lost." He paced the room like a caged animal. His soul cried out within him to be liberated from the body of this death. He thought of the strange tombstone of Gideon Andersen, and wished he too were buried under it, and free forever!

"Yet is it not my duty to look at her?" the devil in his heart whispered. "How can I teach her, how can I influence her for good, if I do not see the effect of my words? Is it not an insult to the Master Himself, and His Divine power, to be thus cowardly and afraid?"

His steps faltered and he leant against the table.

"Christ," he found his lips repeating, "is the explanation of all mysteries. He is the secret root of all natural impulses in us. All emerge from Him and all return to Him. He is to us what their ancient god Pan was to the Greeks. He is in a true sense our *All* — for in him is all we are, all we have, and all we hope. All our passions are His. Touched by Him, their true originator, they lose their dross, are purged of their evil, and give forth sweet-smelling, sweet-breathing — yellow roses!"

He had not intended to say "yellow roses." The sentence had rounded itself off so, apart from his conscious will.

The girl gravely indicated that she heard him; and then smiled dreamily, acquiescingly — the sort of smile that yields to a spiritual idea, as if it were a physical caress.

The scent of burning weeds continued to float in through the window. "Oh, it has gone!" she cried suddenly, as, released from her fingers, the branch

swung back to its place against the sand-stone wall.

"I must have it again," she added, bending her supple body backwards. She made one or two ineffectual efforts and then gave up, panting. "I can't reach it," she said. "But go on, Mr. Clavering. I can listen to you like this. It is so nice out here."

Strange unfathomable thoughts surged up in the depths of Clavering's soul. He found himself wishing that he had authority over her, that he might tame her wilful spirit, and lay her under the yoke of some austere penance. Why was she free to provoke him thus, with her merciless fragility? The madness she was arousing grew steadily upon him. He stumbled awkwardly round the edge of the table and approached her. The scent of burning weeds became yet more emphatic. To make his nearness to her less obvious, and out of a queer mechanical instinct to allay his own conscience, he continued his spiritual admonitions, even when he was quite close — even when he could have touched her with his hand. And it would be so easy to touch her! The playful perilousness of her position in the window made such a movement natural, justifiable, almost conventional.

"The true doctrine of the Incarnation," his lips repeated, "is not that something contrary to nature has happened; it is that the innermost secret of Nature has been revealed. And this secret," — here his fingers closed feverishly on the casement-latch — "is identical with the force that swings the furthest star, and drives the sap through the veins of all living things."

It would have been of considerable interest to

a student of religious psychology — like Mr. Taxater for example — to observe how the phrases that mechanically passed Clavering's lips at this juncture were all phrases drawn from the works of rationalistic modernists. He had recently been reading the charming and subtle essays of Father Mervyn; and the soft and melodious harmonies of that clever theologian's thought had accumulated in some hidden corner of his brain. The authentic religious emotion in him being superseded by a more powerful impulse, his mind mechanically reverted to the large, dim regions of mystical speculation. A certain instinct in him — the instinct of his clamorous senses — made him careful to blur, confuse, and keep far back, that lovely and terrible "Power from Outside," the hem of Whose garments he had clung to, the night before. "Christ," he went on, "is, as it were, the centre and pivot of the whole universe, and every revelation granted to us of His nature is a revelation from the system of things itself. I want you to understand that our true attitude towards this great mystery, ought to be the attitude of scientific explorers, who in searching for hidden causes have come upon the one, the unique Cause."

The girl's only indication that she embraced the significance of these solemn words was to make a sudden gliding serpentine movement which brought her into a position more easy to be retained, and yet one that made it still more unnatural that he should refuse her some kind of playful and affectionate support.

The poor priest's heart beat tumultuously. He began to lose all consciousness of everything except

his propinquity to his provoker. He was aware with appalling distinctness of the precise texture of the light frock that she wore. It was of a soft fawn colour, crossed by wavy lines of a darker tint. He watched the way these wavy lines followed the curves of her figure. They began at her side, and ended where her skirt hung loose over her little swinging ankles. He wished these lines had sloped upwards, instead of downwards; then it would have been so much easier for him to follow the argument of the "Development of Christian Doctrine."

Still that scent of burning weeds! Why must his neighbours set fire to their rubbish, on this particular afternoon?

With a fierce mental effort he tried to suppress the thought that those voluptuous lips only waited for him to overcome his ridiculous scruples. Why must she wait like this so pitilessly passive, laying all the burden of the struggle upon him? If she would only make a little — a very little — movement, his conscience would be able to recover its equilibrium, whatever happened. He tried to unmagnetize her attraction, by visualizing the fact that under this desirable form — so near his touch — lurked nothing but that bleak, bare, last outline of mortality, to which all flesh must come. He tried to see her forehead, her closed eyes, her parted lips, as they would look if resting in a coffin. Like his monkish predecessors in the world-old struggle against Satan, he sought to save himself by clutching fast to the grinning skull.

All this while his lips went on repeating their

liturgical formula. "We must learn to look upon the Redemption, as a natural, not a supernatural fact. We must learn to see in it the motive-force of the whole stream of evolution. We must remember that things *are* what they have it in them to *become*. It is the purpose, the end, which is the true truth — not the process or the method. Christ is the end of all things. He is therefore the beginning of all things. All things find their meaning, their place, their explanation, only in relation to Him. He is the reality of the illusion which we call Nature, and of the illusion which we call Life. In Him the universe becomes real and living — which else were a mere engine of destruction." How much longer he would have continued in this strain — conquered yet still resisting — it were impossible to say. All these noble words, into the rhythm of which so much passionate modern thought had been poured, fell from his lips like sand out of a sieve.

The girl herself interrupted him. With a quick movement she suddenly jerked herself from her recumbent position; jumped, without his help, lightly down upon the floor, and resumed her former place at the table. The explanation of this virtuous retreat soon made itself known in the person of a visitor advancing up the garden. Clavering, who had stumbled foolishly aside as she changed her place, now opened the door and went to meet the new-comer.

It was Romer's manager, Mr. Thomas Lickwit, discreet, obsequious, fawning, as ever, — but with a covert malignity in his hurried words. "Sorry to disturb you, sir. I see it is Miss Gladys' lesson. I

hope the young lady is getting on nicely, sir. I won't detain you for more than a moment. I have just a little matter that couldn't wait. Business is business, you know."

Clavering felt as though he had heard this last observation repeated "ad nauseam" by all the disgusting sycophants in all the sensational novels he had ever read. It occurred to him how closely Mr. Lickwit really did resemble all these monotonously unpleasant people.

"Yes," went on the amiable man, "business is business — even with reverend gentlemen like yourself who have better things to attend to." Clavering forced himself to smile in genial appreciation of this airy wit, and beckoned the manager into his study. He then returned to the front room. "I am afraid our lesson must end for to-night, Miss Romer," he said. "You know enough of this lieutenant of your father's to guess that he will not be easy to get rid of. The worst of a parson's life are these interruptions."

There was no smile upon his face as he said this, but the girl laughed merrily. She adjusted her hat with a deliciously coquettish glance at him through the permissible medium of the gilt-framed mirror. Then she turned and held out her hand. "Till next week, then, Mr. Clavering. And I will read all those books you sent up for me — even the great big black one!"

He gravely opened the door for her, and with a sigh from a heart "sorely charged," returned to face Mr. Lickwit.

He found that gentleman comfortably ensconced

in the only arm-chair. "It is like this, sir," said the man, when Clavering had taken a seat opposite him. "Mr. Romer thinks it would be a good thing if this Social Meeting were put a stop to. There has been talk, sir. I will not conceal it from you. There has been talk. The people say that you have allied yourself with that troublesome agitator. You know the man I refer to, sir, that wretched Wone.

"Mr. Romer doesn't approve of what he hears of these meetings. He doesn't see as how they serve any good purpose. He thinks they promote discord in the place, and set one class against another. He does not like the way, neither, that Mr. Quincunx has been going on down there; nor to say the truth, sir, do *I* like that gentleman's doings very well. He speaks too free, does Mr. Quincunx, much too free, considering how he is situated as you might say."

Clavering leapt to his feet, trembling with anger. "I cannot understand this," he said, "Someone has been misleading Mr. Romer. The Social Meeting is an old institution of this village; and though it is not exactly a church affair, I believe it is almost entirely frequented by church-goers. I have always felt that it served an invaluable purpose in this place. It is indeed the only occasion when priest and people can meet on equal terms and discuss these great questions man to man. No — no, Lickwit, I cannot for a moment consent to the closing of the Social Meeting. It would undo the work of years. It would be utterly unwise. In fact it would be wrong. I cannot think how you can come to me with such a proposal."

Mr. Lickwit made no movement beyond causing his hat to twirl round on the top of the stick he held between his knees.

"You will think better of it, sir. You will think better of it," he said. "The election is coming on, and Mr. Romer expects all supporters of Church and State to help him in his campaign. You have heard he is standing, sir, I suppose?"

Mr. Lickwit uttered the word "standing" in a tone which suggested to Clavering's mind a grotesque image of the British Constitution resting like an enormous cornucopia on the head of the owner of Leo's Hill. He nodded and resumed his seat. The manager continued. "That old Methodist chapel where those meetings are held, belongs, as you know, to Mr. Romer. He is thinking of having it pulled down — not only because of Wone's and Quincunx's goings on there, but because he wants the ground. He's thinking of building an estate-office on that corner. We are pressed for room, up at the Hill, sir."

Once more Clavering rose to his feet. "This is too much!" he cried. "I wonder you have the impertinence to come here and tell me such things. I am not to be bullied, Lickwit. Understand that! I am not to be bullied."

"Then I may tell the master," said the man sneeringly, rising in his turn and making for the door, "that Mr. Parson won't have nothing to do with our little plan?"

"You may tell him what you please, Lickwit. I shall go over myself at once to the House and see Mr. Romer." He glanced at his watch. "It is not seven yet, and I know he does not dine till eight."

"By all means, sir, by all means! He'll be extremely glad to see you. You couldn't do better, sir. You'll excuse me if I don't walk up with you. I have to run across and speak to Mr. Goring."

He bowed himself out and hurried off. Clavering seized his hat and followed him, turning, however, when once in the street, in the direction of the south drive. It took him scarcely a couple of minutes to reach the village square where the drive emerged. In the centre of the square stood a solid erection of Leonian stone adapted to the double purpose of a horse-trough and a drinking fountain. Here the girls came to draw water, and here the lads came to chat and flirt with the girls. Mr. Clavering could not help pausing in his determined march to watch a group of young people engaged in animated and laughing frivolity at this spot. It was a man and two girls. He recognized the man at once by his slight figure and lively gestures. It was Luke Andersen. "That fellow has a bad influence in this place," he said to himself. "He takes advantage of his superior education to unsettle these children's minds. I must stop this." He moved slowly towards the fountain. Luke Andersen looked indeed as reckless and engaging as a young faun out of a heathen story. He was making a cup of his two hands and whimsically holding up the water to the lips of the younger of his companions, while the other one giggled and fluttered round them. Had the priest been in a poetic humour at that moment, he might have been reminded of those queer mediæval legends of the wanderings of the old dispossessed divinities. The young stone-carver, with his classic profile and

fair curly hair, might have passed for a disguised Dionysus seducing to his perilous service the women of some rustic Thessalian hamlet. No pleasing image of this kind crossed Hugh Clavering's vision. All he saw, as he approached the fountain, was another youthful incarnation of the dangerous Power he had been wrestling with all the afternoon. He advanced towards the engaging Luke, much as Christian might have advanced towards Apollyon. "Good evening, Andersen," he said, with a certain professional severity. "Using the fountain, I see? We must be careful, though, not to waste the water this hot summer."

The girl who was drinking rose up with a little start, and stood blushing and embarrassed. Luke appeared entirely at his ease. He leant negligently against the edge of the stone trough, and pushed his hat to the back of his head. In this particular pose he resembled to an extraordinary degree the famous Capitolian statue.

"It is hardly wasting the water, Mr. Clavering," he said with a smile, "offering it to a beautiful mouth. Why don't you curtsey to Mr. Clavering, Annie? I thought all you girls curtsied when clergymen spoke to you."

The priest frowned. The audacious aplomb of the young man unnerved and disconcerted him.

"Water in a stone fountain like this," went on the shameless youth, "has a peculiar charm these hot evenings. It makes you almost fancy you are in Seville. Seville is a place in Spain, Annie. Mr. Clavering will tell you all about it."

"I think Annie had better run in to her mother now," said the priest severely.

"Oh, that's all right," replied the youth with unruffled urbanity. "Her mother has gone shopping in Yeoborough and I have to see that Annie behaves properly till she comes back."

Clavering looked reproachfully at the girl. Something about him — his very inability perhaps to cope with this seductive Dionysus — struck her simple intelligence as pathetic. She made a movement as if to join her companion, who remained roguishly giggling a few paces off. But Luke boldly restrained her. Putting his hand on her shoulder he said laughingly to the priest, "She will be a heart-breaker one of these days, Mr. Clavering, will our Annie here! You wouldn't think she was eighteen, would you, sir?'

Under other circumstances the young clergyman would have unhesitatingly commanded the girl to go home. But his recent experiences had loosened the fibre of his moral courage. Besides, what was there to prevent this incorrigible young man from walking off after her? One could hardly — at least in Protestant England — make one's flock moral by sheer force.

"Well — good-night to you all," he said, and moved away, thinking to himself that at any rate there was safety in publicity. "But what a dangerous person that Andersen is! One never knows how to deal with these half-and-half people. If he were a village-boy it would be different. And it would be different if he were a gentleman. But he is neither one thing or the other. Seville! Who would have thought to have heard Seville referred to, in the middle of Nevilton Square?"

He reached the carved entrance of the House with its deeply-cut armorial bearings — the Seldom falcon with the arrow in its beak. "No more will *that* bird fly," he thought, as he waited for the door to open.

He was ushered into the spacious entrance hall, the usual place of reception for Mr. Romer's less favoured guests. The quarry-owner was alone. He shook hands affably with his visitor and motioned him to a seat.

"I have come about that question of the Social Meeting —" he began.

Mr. Romer cut him short. "It is no longer a question," he said. "It is a 'fait accompli.' I have given orders to have the place pulled down next week. I want the space for building purposes."

Clavering turned white with anger. "We shall have to find another room then," he said. "I cannot have those meetings dropping out from our village life. They keep the thoughtful people together as nothing else can."

Mr. Romer smiled grimly. "You will find it difficult to discover another place," he remarked.

"Then I shall have them in my own house," said the vicar of Nevilton.

Mr. Romer crossed his hands and threw back his head; looking, with the air of one who watches the development of precisely foreseen events, straight into the sad eyes of the little Royal Servant on the wall.

"Pardon such a question, my friend," said he, "but may I ask you what your personal income is, at this moment?"

"You know that well enough," returned the other.

"I have nothing beyond the hundred and fifty pounds I receive as vicar of this place."

"And what," pursued the Quarry-owner, "may your expenditure amount to?"

"That, also, you know well," replied Clavering. "I give away about eighty pounds, every year, to the poor of this village."

"And where does this eighty pounds come from?" went on the Squire. The priest was silent.

"I will tell you where it comes from," pronounced the other. "It comes from me. It is my contribution, out of the tithes which I receive as lay-rector. And it is the larger part of them."

The priest was still silent.

"When I first came here," his interlocutor continued, "I gave up these tithes as an offering to our village necessities; and I have not yet withdrawn them. If this Social Meeting, Mr. Clavering, is not brought to an end, I shall withdraw them. And no one will be able to blame me."

Hugh jumped up on his feet with a gesture of fury. "I call this," he shouted, "nothing short of sacrilege! Yes, sacrilege and tyranny! I shall proclaim it abroad. I shall write to the papers. I shall appeal to the bishop — to the country!"

"As you please," said Mr. Romer quietly, "as you please. I should only like to point out that any action of this kind will tie up my purse-strings forever. You will not be popular with your flock, my friend. I know something of our dear Nevilton people; and I shall have only to make it plain to them that it is their vicar who has reduced this charity; and you will not find yourself greatly loved!"

Clavering fell back into his chair with a groan. He knew too well the truth of the man's words. He knew also the straits into which this lack of money would plunge half his benevolent activities in the parish. He hung his head gloomily and stared at the floor. What would he not have given, at that moment, to have been able to meet this despot, man to man, unencumbered by his duty to his people!

"Let me assure you, my dear sir," said Mr. Romer quietly, "that you are not by any means fighting the cause of your church, in supporting this wretched Meeting. If I were bidding you interrupt your services or your sacraments, it would be another matter. This Social Meeting has strong anti-clerical prejudices. You know that, as well as I. It is conducted entirely on noncomformist lines. I happen to be aware," he added, "since you talk of appealing to the bishop, that the good man has already, on more than one occasion, protested vigorously against the association of his clergy with this kind of organization. I do not know whether you ever glance at that excellent paper the Guardian; but if so you will find, in this last week's issue, a very interesting case, quite parallel to ours, in which the bishop's sympathies were by no means on the side you are advocating."

The young priest rose and bowed. "There is, at any rate, no necessity for me to trouble you any further," he said. "So I will bid you good-night."

He left the hall hastily, picked up his hat, and let himself out, before his host had time to reply. All the way down the drive his thoughts reverted to the

seductive wiles of this despot's daughter. "The saints are deserting me," he thought, "by reason of my sin."

He was not, even then, destined to escape his temptress. Gladys, who doubtless had been expecting this sudden retreat, emerged from the shadow of the trees and intercepted him. "I will walk to the gate with you," she said. The power of feminine attraction is never more insidious than at the moment of bitter remorse. The mind reverts so easily, so willingly, then, back to the dangerous way. The mere fact of its having lost its pride of resistance, its vanity of virtue, makes it yield to a new assault with terrible facility. She drew him into the dusky twilight of the scented exotic cedars which bordered the way, on the excuse of inhaling their fragrance more closely.

She made him pull down a great perfumed cypress-bough, of some unusual species, so that they might press their faces against it. They stood so closely together that she could feel through her thin evening-gown the furious trembling that seized him. She knew that he had completely lost his self-control, and was quite at her mercy. But Gladys had not the least intention of yielding herself to the emotion she had excited. What she intended was that he should desire her to desperation, not that, by the least touch, his desire should be gratified. In another half-second, as she well knew, the poor priest would have seized her in his arms. In place of permitting this, what she did was to imprint a fleeting kiss with her warm lips upon the back of his hand, and then to leap out of danger with a ringing laugh. "Good-

bye!" she called back at him, as she ran off. "I'll come in good time next week."

It may be imagined in what a turbulence of miserable feelings Hugh Clavering repassed the village square. He glanced quickly at the fountain. Yes! Luke Andersen was still loitering in the same place, and the little bursts of suppressed screams and laughter, and the little fluttering struggles, of the group around him, indicated that he was still, in his manner, corrupting the maidens of Nevilton. The priest longed to put his hands to his ears and run down the street, even as Christian ran from the city of Destruction. What was this power — this invincible, all-pervasive power — against which he had committed himself to contend? He felt as though he were trying, with his poor human strength, to hold back the sea-tide, so that it should not cover the sands.

Could it be that, after all, the whole theory of the church was wrong, and that the great Life-Force was against her, and punishing her, for seeking, with her vain superstitions, to alter the stars in their courses?

Could it be that this fierce pleasure-lust, which he felt so fatally in Gladys, and saw in Luke, and was seduced by in his own veins, was after all the true secret of Nature, and, to contend against it, madness and impossible folly? Was he, and not they, the really morbid and infatuated one — morbid with the arbitrary pride of a desperate tradition of perverted heroic souls? He moved along the pavement under the church wall and looked up at its grand immovable tower. "Are you, too," he thought, "but

the symbol of an insane caprice in the mad human race, seeking, in fond recklessness, to alter the basic laws of the great World?"

The casuistical philosophy of Mr. Taxater returned to his mind. What would the papal apologist say to him now, thus torn and tugged at by all the forces of hell? He felt a curious doubt in his heart as to the side on which, in this mad struggle, the astute theologian really stood. Perhaps, for all his learning, the man was no more Christian in his true soul, than had been many of those historic popes whose office he defended. In his desperate mood Clavering longed to get as near as possible to the altar of this God of his, who thus bade him confront the whole power of nature and all the wisdom of the world. He looked up and down the street. Two men were talking outside The Goat and Boy, but their backs were turned. With a quick sudden movement he put his hands on the top of the wall and scrambled hastily over, scraping his shins as he did so on a sharp stone at the top. He moved rapidly to the place where rose the strange tombstone designed by the atheist carver. It was here that Vennie and he had entered into their heroic covenant only twenty-four hours before. He looked at the enormous skull so powerfully carved and at the encircled cross beneath it. He laid his hand upon the skull, precisely as he had done the night before; only this time there were no little cold fingers to instil pure devotion into him. Instead of the touch of such fingers he felt the burning contact of Gladys' soft lips.

No! it was an impossible task that his God had laid upon him. Why not give up the struggle? Why not

throw over this mad idol of purity he had raised for his worship, and yield himself to the great stream? The blood rushed to his head with the alluring images that this thought evoked. Perhaps, after all, Gladys would marry him, and then — why, then, he could revert to the humorous wisdom of Mr. Taxater, and cultivate the sweet mystical speculations of modernism; reconciling, pleasantly and easily, the natural pleasures of the senses, with the natural exigencies of the soul!

He left Gideon's grave and walked back to the church-porch. It was now nearly dark and without fear of being observed by any one through the iron bars of the outer gate, he entered the porch and stood before the closed door. He wished he had brought the key with him. How he longed, at that moment, to fling himself down before the altar and cry aloud to his God!

By his side stood the wheeled parish bier, ornamented by a gilt inscription, informing the casual intruder that it had been presented to the place in honour of the accession of King George the Fifth. There was not light enough to read these touching words, but the gilt plate containing them gave forth a faint scintillating glimmer.

Worn out by the day-long struggle in his heart, Clavering sat down upon this grim "memento mori"; and then, after a minute or two, finding that position uncomfortable, deliberately stretched himself out at full length upon the thing's bare surface. Lying here, with the bats flitting in and out above his head, the struggle in his mind continued. Supposing he did yield,—not altogether, of course; his whole nature was against that, and his public position stood in the

way, — but just a little, just a hair's breadth, could he not enjoy a light playful flirtation with Gladys, such as she was so obviously prepared for, even if it were impossible to marry her? The worst of it was that his imagination so enlarged upon the pleasures of this "playful flirtation," that it very quickly became an obsessing desire. He propped himself up upon his strange couch and looked forth into the night. The stars were just beginning to appear, and he could see one or two constellations whose names he knew. How indifferent they were, those far-off lights! What did it matter to them whether he yielded or did not yield? He had the curious sensation that the whole conflict in which he was entangled belonged to a terrestial sphere infinitely below those heavenly luminaries. Not only the Power against which he contended, but the Power on whose side he fought, seemed out-distanced and derided by those calm watchers.

He sank back again and gazed up at the carved stone roof above him. A dull inert weariness stole over his brain; a sick disgust of the whole mad business of a man's life upon earth. Why was he born into the world with passions that he must not satisfy and ideals that he could not hold? Better not to have been born at all; or, being born, better to lie quiet and untroubled, with all these placid church-yard people, under the heavy clay! The mental weariness that assailed him gradually changed into sheer physical drowsiness. His head sought instinctively a more easy position and soon found what it sought. His eyes closed; and there, upon the parish bier, worn out with his struggle against Apollyon, the vicar of

Nevilton slept. When he returned to consciousness he found himself cramped, cold and miserable. Hurriedly he scrambled to his feet, stretched his stiff limbs and listened. The clock in the Tower above him began to strike. It struck one — two — and then stopped. He had slept for nearly five hours.

CHAPTER X

THE ORCHARD

EVERY natural locality has its hour of special self-assertion; its hour, when the peculiar qualities and characteristics which belong to it emphasize themselves, and attain a sort of temporary apogee or culmination. It is then that such localities — be they forests or moors, hill-sides or valleys — seem to gather themselves together and bring themselves into focus, waiting expectantly, it might almost seem, for some answering dramatic crisis in human affairs which should find in them an inevitable background.

One of the chief features of our English climate is that no two successive days, even in a spell of the warmest weather, are exactly alike. What one might call the culminant day of that summer, for the orchards of Nevilton, arrived shortly after Mr. Clavering's unfortunate defeat. Every hour of this day seemed to add something more and more expressive to their hushed and expectant solitudes.

Though the hay had been cut, or was being cut, in the open fields, in these shadowy recesses the grass was permitted to grow lush and long, at its own unimpeded will.

Between the ancient trunks of the moss-grown apple-trees hung a soft blue vapour; and the flickering sunlight that pierced the denser foliage, threw shadows upon the heavy grass that were as deeply

purple as the waves of the mid-Atlantic. There was indeed something so remote from the ordinary movements of the day about this underworld of dim, rich seclusion, that the image of a sleepy wave-lulled land, long sunken out of reach of human invasion, under the ebbing and flowing tide, seemed borne in naturally upon the imagination.

It was towards the close of the afternoon of this particular segment of time that the drowsy languor of these orchards reached its richest and most luxurious moment. Grass, moss, lichen, mistletoe, gnarled trunks, and knotted roots, all seemed to cry aloud, at this privileged hour, for some human recognition of their unique quality; some human event which should give that quality its dramatic value, its planetary proportion. Not since the Hesperidean Dragon guarded its sacred charge, in the classic story, has a more responsive background offered itself to what Catullus calls the "furtive loves" of mortal men.

About six o'clock, on this day of the apogee of the orchards, Mr. Romer, seated on the north terrace of his house, caught sight of his daughter and her companion crossing the near corner of the park. He got up at once, and walked across the garden to intercept them. The sight of the Italian's slender drooping figure, as she lingered a little behind her cousin, roused into vivid consciousness all manner of subterranean emotions in the quarry-owner's mind. He felt as an oriental pasha might feel, when under the stress of some political or monetary transaction, he is compelled to hand over his favorite girl-slave to an obsequious dependent. The worst of it was that he could not be absolutely sure of Mr. Goring's

continued adherence. It was within the bounds of possibility that once in possession of Lacrima, the farmer might breathe against him gross Thersites-like defiance, and carry off his captive to another county. He experienced, at that moment, a sharp pang of inverted remorse at the thought of having to relinquish his prey.

As he strode along by the edge of the herbaceous borders, where the blue spikes of the delphiniums were already in bud, his mind swung rapidly from point to point in the confused arena of his various contests and struggles.

Mixed strangely enough with his direct Napoleonic pursuit of wealth and power, there was latent in Mr. Romer, as we have already hinted, a certain dark and perverse sensuality, which was capable of betraying and distorting, in very curious ways, the massive force of his intelligence.

At this particular moment, as he emerged into the park, he found himself beginning to regret his conversation with his brother-in-law. But, after all, he thought, when Gladys married, it would be difficult to find any reason for keeping Lacrima at his side. His feelings towards the girl were a curious mixture of attraction and hatred. And what could better gratify this mixed emotion than a plan which would keep her within his reach and at the same time humiliate and degrade her? To do the master of Nevilton justice, he was not, at that moment, as he passed under a group of Spanish chestnuts and observed the object of his conspiracy rendered gentler and more fragile than ever by the loveliness of her surroundings, altogether devoid of a certain remote

feeling of compunction. He crushed it down, however, by his usual thought of the brevity and futility of all these things, and the folly of yielding to weak commiseration, when, in so short a time, nothing, one way or the other, would matter in the least! He had long ago trained himself to make use of these materialistic reasonings to suppress any irrelevant prickings of conscience which might interfere with the bias of his will. The whole world, looked at with the bold cynical eye of one who was not afraid to face the truth, was, after all, a mad, wild, unmeaning struggle; and, in the confused arena of this struggle, one could be sure of nothing but the pleasure one derived from the sensation of one's own power. He tried, as he walked towards the girls, to imagine to himself what his feelings would be, supposing he yielded to these remote scruples, and let Lacrima go, giving her money, for instance, to enable her to live independently in her own country, or to marry whom she pleased. She would no doubt marry that damned fool Quincunx! Lack of money was, assuredly, all that stood in the way. And how could he contemplate an idea of that kind with any pleasure? He wondered, in a grim humorous manner, what sort of compensation these self-sacrificing ones really got. What satisfaction would *he* get, for instance, in the consciousness that he had thrown a girl who attracted him, into the arms of an idiot who excited his hate?

He looked long at Lacrima, as she stood with Gladys, under a sycamore, waiting his approach. It was curious, he said to himself,—very curious,—the sort of feelings she excited in him. It was not that he wished to possess her. He was scornfully cynical

about that sort of gratification. He wished to do more than possess her. He wished to humiliate her, to degrade her, to put her to shame in her inmost spirit. He wished her to know that he knew that she was suffering this shame, and that he was the cause of it. He wished her to feel herself absolutely in his power, not bodily — that was nothing! — but morally, and spiritually.

The owner of Leo's Hill had the faculty of detaching himself from his own darkest thoughts, and of observing them with a humorous and cynical eye. It struck him as not a little grotesque, that he, the manipulater of far-flung financial intrigues, the ambitious politician, the formidable captain of industry, should be thus scheming and plotting to satisfy the caprice of a mere whim, upon the destiny of a penniless dependent. It *was* grotesque — grotesque and ridiculous. Let it be! The whole business of living was grotesque and ridiculous. One snatched fiercely at this thing or the other, as the world moved round; and one was not bound always to present oneself in a dignified mask before one's own tribunal. It was enough that this or that fantasy of the dominant power-instinct demanded a certain course of action. Let it be as grotesque as it might! He, and none other, was the judge of his pleasure, of what he pleased to do, or to refrain from doing. It was his humour;—and that ended it! He lived to fulfil his humour. There was nothing else to live for, in this fantastic chaotic world! Meditating in this manner he approached the girls.

"It occurred to me," he said, breathing a little hard, and addressing his daughter, "that you might

be seeing Mr. Clavering again tonight. If so, perhaps you would give him a message from me, or rather, — how shall I put it? — a suggestion, a gentle hint."

"What are you driving at, father?" asked Gladys, pouting her lips and swinging her parasol.

"It is a message best delivered by mouth," Mr. Romer went on, "and by your mouth."

Then as if to turn this last remark into a delicate compliment, he playfully lifted up the girl's chin with his finger and made as if to kiss her. Gladys, however, lightly evaded him, and tossing her head mischievously, burst out laughing. "I know you, father, I know you," she cried. "You want me to do some intriguing for you. You never kiss me like that, unless you do!"

Lacrima glanced apprehensively at the two of them. Standing there, in the midst of that charming English scene, they represented to her mind all that was remorseless, pitiless and implacable in this island of her enforced adoption. Swiftly, from those ruddy pinnacles of the great house behind them, her mind reverted to the little white huts in a certain Apennine valley and the tinkling bells of the goats led back from pasture. Oh how she hated all this heavy foliage and these eternally murmuring doves!

"Well," said Mr. Romer, as Gladys waited mockingly, "I do want you to do something. I want you to hint to our dear clergyman that this ceremony of your reception into his church is dependent upon his good behaviour. Not *your* good behavior," he repeated smiling, "but *his*. The truth is, dear child, if I may speak quite plainly, I know the persuasive

power of your pretty face over all these young men; and I want you to make it plain to this worthy priest that if you are to continue being nice to him, he must be very nice to *me*. Do you catch my meaning, my plump little bird?" As he spoke he encircled her waist with his arm. Lacrima, watching them, thought how singularly alike father and daughter were, and was conscious of an instinctive desire to run and warn this new victim of conspiracy.

"Why, what has he been doing, father?" asked the fair girl, shaking herself free, and opening her parasol.

"He has been supporting that fellow Wone. And he has been talking nonsense about Quincunx, — yes, about your friend Quincunx," he added, nodding ironically towards Lacrima.

"And I am to punish him, am I?" laughed Gladys. "That is lovely! I love punishing people, especially people like Mr. Clavering who think they are so wonderfully good!"

Mr. Romer smiled. "Not exactly punish him, dear, but lead him gently into the right path. Lead him, in fact, to see that the party to belong to in this village is the party of capacity — not the party of chatter."

Gladys looked at her father seriously. "You don't mean that you are actually afraid of losing this election?" she said. Mr. Romer stretched out his arm and rested himself against the umbrageous sycamore, pressing his large firm hand upon its trunk.

"Losing it, child? No, I shan't lose it. But these idiots do really annoy me. They are all such cowards and such sentimental babies. It is people like these who

have to be ruled with a firm hand. They cringe and whimper when you talk to them; and then the moment your back is turned they grow voluble and impertinent. My workmen are no better. They owe everything to me. If it wasn't for me, half those quarries would be shut down tomorrow and they'd be out of a job. But do you think they are grateful? Not a bit of it!" His tone grew more angry. He felt a need of venting the suppressed rage of many months. "Yes, you needn't put on that unconscious look, Lacrima. I know well enough where *your* sympathies lie. The fact is, in these rotten days, it is the incapable and miserable who give the tone to everyone! No one thinks for himself. No one goes to the bottom of things. It is all talk — talk — talk; talk about equality, about liberty, about kindness to the weak. I hate the weak; and I refuse to let them interfere with me! Look at the faces of these people. Well, — you know, Gladys, what they are like. They are all feeble, bloodless, sneaking, fawning idiots! I hate the faces of these Nevilton fools. They are always making me think of slugs and worms. This Wone is typical. His disgusting complexion and flabby mouth is characteristic of them all. No one of them has the spirit to hit one properly back, face to face. And their odious, sentimental religion!— This Clavering of yours ought to know better. He is not quite devoid of intelligence. He showed some spirit when I talked with him. But he is besotted, too, with this silly nonsense about humouring the people, and considering the people, and treating the people in a Christian spirit! As though you could treat worms and slugs in any other spirit than the

spirit of trampling upon them. They are born to be trampled upon — born for it — I tell you! You have only to look at them!" He glared forth over the soft rich fields; and continued, still more bitterly:

"Its no good your pretending not to hear me, Lacrima! I can read your thoughts like an open book. You are quoting to yourself, no doubt, at this very moment, some of the pretty speeches of your friend Quincunx. A nice fellow, he is, for a girl's teacher! A fellow with no idea of his own in his head! A fellow afraid to raise his eyes above one's boot-laces! Why the other day, when I was out shooting and met him in the lane, he turned straight round, and walked back on his tracks — simply from fear of passing me. I hate these sneaking cowards! I hate their cunning, miserable, little ways! I should like to trample them all out of existence! That is the worst of being strong in this world. One is worried to death by a lot of fools who are not worth the effort spent on them."

Lacrima uttered no word, but looked sadly away, over the fair landscape. In her heart, in spite of her detestation of the man, she felt a strange fantastic sympathy with a good deal of what he said. Women, especially women of Latin races, have no great respect for democratic sentiments when they do not issue in definite deeds. Her private idea of a revolutionary leader was something very far removed from the voluble local candidate, and she had suffered too much herself from the frail petulance of Maurice Quincunx not to feel a secret longing that somewhere, somehow, this aggressive tyrant should be faced by a strength as firm, as capable, as fearless, as his own.

Mr. Romer, with his swarthy imperial face and powerful figure, seemed to her, as he leant against the tree, so to impress himself upon that yielding landscape, that there appeared reason enough for his complaint that he could find no antagonist worthy of his steel. In the true manner of a Pariah, who turns, with swift contempt, upon her own class, the girl was conscious of a rising tide of revolt in her heart against the incompetent weakness of her friend. What would she not give to be able, even once, to see this man outfaced and outwitted! She was impressed too, poor girl, as she shrank silently aside from his sarcasm, by the horrible indifference of these charming sunlit fields to the brutality of the man's challenge. They cared nothing — nothing! It was impossible to make them care. Hundreds of years ago they had slumbered, just as dreamily, just as indifferently, as they did now. If even at this moment she were to plunge a knife into the man's heart, so that he fell a mass of senseless clay at her feet, that impervious wood-pigeon would go on murmuring its monotonous ditty, just as peacefully, just as serenely! There was something really terrifying to her in this callous indifference of Nature. It was like living perpetually in close contact with a person who was deaf and dumb and blind; and who, while the most tragic events were being transacted, went on cheerfully and imperturbably humming some merry tune. It would be almost better, thought the girl, if that tree-trunk against which the quarry-owner pressed his heavy hand were really in league with him. Anything were better than this smiling indifference which seemed to keep on repeating in a voice

as monotonous as the pigeon's — "Everything is permitted. Nothing is forbidden. Nothing is forbidden. Everything is permitted." like the silly reiterated whirring of some monstrous placid shuttle. It was strange, the rebellious inconsistent thoughts, which passed through her mind! She wondered why Hugh Clavering was thus to be waylaid and persuaded. Had he dared to rise in genuine opposition? No, she did not believe it. He had probably talked religion, just as Maurice talked anarchy and Wone talked socialism. It was all talk! Romer was quite right. They had no spirit in them, these English people. She thought of the fierce atheistic rebels of her own country. *They*, at any rate, understood that evil had to be resisted by action, and not by vague protestations of unctuous sentiment!

When Mr. Romer left them and returned to his seat on the terrace, the girls did not at once proceed on their way, but waited, hesitating; and amused themselves by pulling down the lower branches of a lime and trying to anticipate the sweetness of its yet unbudded fragrance.

"Let's stroll down the drive first," said Gladys presently, "till we are out of sight, and then we can cross the mill mead and get into the orchard that way." They followed this design with elaborate caution, and only when quite concealed from the windows of the house, turned quickly northward and left the park for the orchards. Between the wall, of the north garden and the railway, lay some of the oldest and least frequented of these shadowy places, completely out of the ordinary paths of traffic, and only accessible by field-ways. Into the smallest and

most secluded of all these the girls wandered, gliding noiselessly between the thick hedges and heavy grass, like two frail phantoms of the upper world visiting some Elysian solitude.

Gladys laid her hand on her companion's arm. "We had better wait here," she said, "where we can see the whole orchard. They ought to know, by now, where to come."

They seated themselves on the bowed trunk of an ancient apple-tree that by long decline had at last reached a horizontal position. The flowering season was practically over, though here and there a late cider-tree, growing more in shadow than the rest, still carried its delicate burden of clustered blossoms.

"How many times is it that we have met them here?" whispered the fair girl, snatching off her hat and tossing it on the grass. "This is the fifth time, isn't it? What dear things they are! I think its much more exciting, this sort of thing, — don't you? — than dull tennis parties with silly idiots like young Ilminster."

The Italian nodded. "It is a good thing that James and I get on so well," she said. "It would be awkward if we were as afraid of one another as when we first met."

Gladys put her hand caressingly on her companion's knee and looked into her face with a slow seductive smile.

"You are forgetting your Mr. Quincunx a little, just a little, these days, aren't you, darling? Don't be shy, now — or look cross. You know you are! You can't deny it. Your boy is almost as nice as mine. He doesn't like me, though. I can see that!

But I like *him*. I like him awfully! You'd better take care, child. If ever I get tired of my Luke —"

"James isn't a boy," protested Lacrima.

"Silly!" cried Gladys. "Of course he is. Who cares about age? They are all the same. I always call them boys when they attract me. I like the word. I like to say it. It makes me feel as if I were one of those girls in London. You know what I mean!"

Lacrima looked at her gravely. "I always feel as if James Andersen were much older than I," she said.

"But your Mr. Quincunx," repeated the fair creature, slipping her soft fingers into her friend's hand, "your Mr. Quincunx is not quite what he was to you, before we began these adventures?"

"I wish you wouldn't say that, Gladys!" rejoined the Italian, freeing her hands and clasping them passionately together. "It is wicked of you to say that! You know I only talk to James so that you can do what you like. I shall always be Maurice's friend. I shall be his friend to the last!"

Gladys laughed merrily. "That is what I wanted," she retorted. "I wanted to make you burst out. When people burst out, they are always doubtful in their hearts. Ah, little puritan! so we are already in the position of having two sweethearts, are we? — and not knowing which of the two we really like best? That is a very pretty situation to be in. It is where we all are! I hope you enjoy it!"

Lacrima let her hands fall helplessly to her side, against the grey bark of the apple-tree. "Why do you hate Mr. Quincunx so?" she asked, looking gravely into her friend's face.

"Why do I hate him?" said Gladys. "Oh, I really don't know! I didn't know I did. If I do, it's because he's such a weak wretched creature. He has no more spirit than a sick dog. He talks such nonsense too! I am glad he has to walk to Yeoborough every day and do a little work. You ought to be glad too! He could never marry if he didn't make some money."

"He doesn't want to marry," murmured Lacrima. "He only wants to be left alone."

"A nice friend he seems to be," cried the other, "for a girl like you! I suppose he kisses you and that sort of thing, doesn't he? I shouldn't like to be kissed by a silly old man like that, with a great stupid beard."

"You mustn't say these things to me, Gladys, you mustn't! I won't hear them. Mr. Quincunx isn't an old man! He is younger than James Andersen. He is not forty yet."

"He looks fifty, if he looks a day," said Gladys, "and the colour of his beard is disgusting! It's like dirty water. Fancy having a horrid thing like that pressed against your face! And I suppose he cries and slobbers over you, doesn't he? I have seen him cry. I hate a man who cries. He cried the other night, — father told me so — when he found he had spent all his money."

Lacrima got up and walked a few paces away. She loathed this placid golden-haired creature, at that moment, so intensely, that it was all she could do to refrain from leaping upon her and burying her teeth in her soft neck. She leant against one of the trees and pressed her head upon its grey lichen. Gladys

slipped down into a more luxurious position. She looked complacently around her. No spot could have been better adapted for a romantic encounter.

The gnarled and time-worn trunks of the old apple-trees, each looking as if it had lingered there, full of remote memories, from an age coeval with the age of those very druids whose sacred mistletoe still clung in patches to their boughs, formed a strange fantastic array of twisted and distorted natural pillars, upon which the foliage, meeting everywhere above their heads, leaned in shadowy security, like the roof of a heathen temple. The buttercups and cuckoo-flowers, which, here and there, sprinkled the heavy grass, were different from those in the open meadows. The golden hue of the one, and the lavender tint of the other, took on, in this diurnal gloom, a chilly and tender pallour, both colours approximating to white. The grey lichen hung down in loose festoons from the higher portions of the knotted trunks, and crept, thick and close, round the moss at their roots. There could hardly be conceived a spot more suggestive of absolute and eternal security than this Hesperidean enclosure.

The very fact of the remote but constant presence of humanity there, as a vague dreamy background of immemorial tending, increased this sense. One felt that the easy invasions of grafting-time and gathering-time, returning perennially in their seasons, only intensified the long delicious solitudes of the intervals between, when, in rich, hushed languor, the blossoms bud and bloom and fall; and the fruit ripens and sweetens; and the leaves flutter down. That exquisite seductive charm, the charm of places full of

quietness, yet bordering on the edge of the days' labour, hung like a heavy atmosphere of contentment over the shadowy aisles of this temple of peace. The wood-pigeons keep up a perpetual murmur, all the summer long, in these untrodden spots. No eyes see them. It is as though they never saw one another. But their drowsy liturgical repetitions answer and answer again, as if from the unfathomable depths of some dim green underworld, worshipping the gods of silence with sounds that give silence itself a richer, a fuller weight.

"There they are!" cried Gladys suddenly, as the figures of the Andersen brothers made themselves visible on the further side of the orchard.

The girls advanced to meet them through the thick grass, swinging their summer-hats in their hands and bending their heads, now and then, to avoid the over-hanging boughs. The meeting between these four persons would have made a pleasant and appropriate subject for one of those richly-coloured old-fashioned prints which one sometimes observes in early Victorian parlours. Gladys grew quite pale with excitement, and her voice assumed a vibrant tenderness when she accosted Luke, which made Lacrima give a little start of surprise, as she shook hands with the elder brother. Had her persecutor then, got, after all, some living tissue in the place where the heart beat?

Luke's manner had materially altered since he had submitted so urbanely to the fair girl's insulting airs at the close of their first encounter. His way of treating her now was casual, flippant, abrupt — almost indifferent. Instead of following the pathetic

pressure of her arm and hand, which at once bade him hasten the separation of the group, he deliberately lingered, chatting amicably with Lacrima and asking her questions about Italy. It seemed that the plausible Luke knew quite as much about Genoa and Florence and Venice as his more taciturn brother, and all he knew he was well able to turn into effective use. He was indeed a most engaging and irresistible conversationalist; and Gladys grew paler and paler, as she watched the animation of his face and listened to his pleasant and modulated voice.

It caused sheer suffering to her fiercely impetuous nature, this long-drawn out delay. Every moment that passed diminished the time they would have together. Her nerves ached for the touch of his arms about her, and a savage desire to press her mouth to his, and satiate herself with kisses, throbbed in her every vein. Why would he not stop this irrelevant stream of talk? What did she care about the narrow streets of Genoa, — or the encrusted façade of San Marco? It had been their custom to separate immediately on meeting, and for Luke to carry her off to a charming hiding-place they had discovered. With the fierce pantherish craving of a love-scorched animal her soul cried out to be clasped close to her friend in this secluded spot, having her will of those maddening youthful lips with their proud Grecian curve! Still he must go on talking!

James and Lacrima, lending themselves, naturally and easily, to the mood of the moment, were already seated at the foot of a twisted and ancestral apple-tree. Soon Luke, still absorbed in his conversation with the Italian, shook off Gladys' arm and settled

himself beside them, plucking a handful of grass, as he did so, and inhaling its fragrance with sybarite pleasure.

"St. Mark's is the only church in the world for me," Luke was saying. "I have pictures of it from every conceivable angle. It is quite a mania with me collecting such things. I have dozens of them; haven't I, James?"

"Do you mean those postcards father sent home when he went over there to work?" answered the elder brother, one of whose special peculiarities was a curious pleasure in emphasizing, in the presence of the "upper classes," the humility of his origin.

Luke laughed. "Well—yes—those—and others," he said. "*You* haven't the least idea what I keep in my drawer of secret treasures; you know you haven't! I've got some lovely letters there among other things. Letters that I wouldn't let anyone see for the world!" He glanced smilingly at Gladys, who was pacing up and down in front of them, like a beautiful tigress.

"Look here, my friends," she said. "The time is slipping away frightfully. We are not going to sit here all the while, are we, talking nonsense, like people at a garden party?"

"It's so lovely here," said Luke with a slow smile. "I really don't think that your favourite corner is so much nicer. I am in no hurry to move. Are you, Miss Traffio?"

Lacrima saw a look upon her cousin's face that boded ill for their future relations if she did not make some kind of effort. She rose to her feet.

"Come, Mr. Andersen," she said, giving James a

wistful look. "Let us take a little stroll, and then return again to these young people."

James rose obediently, and they walked off together. They passed from the orchards belonging to Mr. Romer's tenant, and entered those immediately at the foot of the vicarage garden. Here, through a gap in the hedge they were attracted by the sight of a queer bed of weeds growing at the edge of a potato-patch. They were very curious weeds, rather resembling sea-plants than land-plants; in colour of a dull glaucous green, and in shape grotesquely elongated.

"What are those things?" said Lacrima. "I think I have never seen such evil-looking plants. Why do they let them grow there?"

James surveyed the objects. "They certainly have a queer look," he said, "but you know, in old days, there was a grave-yard here, of a peculiar kind. It is only in the last fifty years that they have dug it up and included it in this garden."

Lacrima shuddered. "I would not eat those potatoes for anything! You know I think I come to dislike more and more the look of your English vegetable gardens, with their horrid, heavy leaves, so damp and oozy and disgusting!"

"I agree with you there," returned the wood-carver. "I have always hated Nevilton, and every aspect of it; but I think I hate these overgrown gardens most of all."

"They look as if they were fed from churchyards, don't they?" went on the girl. "Look at those heavy laurel bushes over there, and those dreadful fir-trees! I should cut them all down if this place

belonged to me. Oh, how I long for olives and vineyards! These orchards are all very well, but they seem to me as if they were made to keep out the sun and the wholesome air."

James Andersen smiled grimly. "Orchards and potato gardens!" he muttered. "Yes, these are typical of this country of clay. And these vicarage shrubberies! I think a shrubbery is the last limit of depression and desolation. I am sure all the murders committed in this country are planned in shrubberies, and under the shade of damp laurel-bushes."

"In our country we grow corn between the fruit-trees," said Lacrima.

"Yes, corn —" returned Andersen, "corn and wine and oil! Those are the natural, the beautiful, products of the earth. Things that are fed upon sun and air — not upon the bones of the dead! All these Nevilton places, however luxuriant, seem to me to smell of death."

"But was this corner really a churchyard?" asked the Italian. "I hope Mrs. Seldom won't stroll down this way and see us!"

"Mrs. Seldom is well suited to the place she lives in," returned the other. "She lives upon the Past, just as her garden does — just as her potatoes do! These English vicarages are dreadful places. They have all the melancholy of age without its historic glamour. And how morbid they are! Any of your cheerful Latin curés would die in them, simply of damp and despair."

"But do tell me about this spot," repeated Lacrima, with a little shiver. "Why did you say it was a peculiar churchyard?"

"It was the place where they buried unbaptized children," answered Andersen, and added, in a lower tone, "how cold it is getting! It must be the shadow we are in."

"But you haven't yet," murmured Lacrima, "you haven't yet told me, what those weeds are."

"Well — we call them 'mares'-tails' about here," answered the stone-carver, "I don't know their proper name."

"But why don't they dig them up? Look! They are growing all among the potatoes."

"They can't dig them up," returned the man. "They can't get at their roots. They are the worst and most obstinate weed there is. They grow in all the Nevilton gardens. They are the typical Nevilton flora. They must have grown here in the days of the druids."

"But how absurd!" cried Lacrima. "I feel as if I could pull them up with my hands. The earth looks so soft."

"The earth is soft enough," replied Andersen, "but the roots of these weeds adhere fast to the rock underneath. The rock, you know, the sandstone rock, lies only a short distance beneath our feet."

"The same stone as Nevilton house is built of?"

"Certainly the same. Our stone, Mr. Romer's stone, the stone upon which we all live here — except those who till the fields."

"I hate the thing!" cried Lacrima, in curious agitation.

"You do? Well — to tell you the honest truth, so do I. I associate it with my father."

"I associate it with Gladys," whispered Lacrima.

"I can believe it. We both associate it with houses of tyranny, of wretched persecution. Perhaps I have never told you that my father was directly the cause of my mother's death?"

"You have hinted it," murmured the girl. "I suspected it. But Luke loves the stone, doesn't he? He always speaks as if the mere handling of it, in his workshop, gave him exquisite pleasure."

"A great many things give Luke exquisite pleasure," returned the other grimly. "Luke lives for exquisite pleasure."

A quick step on the grass behind them made them swing suddenly round. It was Vennie Seldom, who, unobserved, had been watching them from the vicarage terrace. A few paces behind her came Mr. Taxater, walking cautiously and deliberately, with the air of a Lord Chesterfield returning from an audience at St. James'. Mr. Taxater had already met the Italian on one or two occasions. He had sat next to her once, when dining at Nevilton House, and he was considerably interested in her.

"What a lovely evening, Miss Traffio," said Vennie shyly, but without embarrassment. Vennie was always shy, but nothing ever interfered with her self-possession.

"I am glad you are showing Mr. Andersen these orchards of ours. I always think they are the most secluded place in the whole village."

"Ha!" said Mr. Taxater, when he had greeted them with elaborate and friendly courtesy, "I thought you two were bound to make friends sooner or later! I call you my two companions in exile, among our dear Anglo-Saxons. Miss Traffio I know is Latin,

and you, sir, must have some kind of foreign blood. I am right, am I not, Mr. Andersen?"

James looked at him humorously, though a little grimly. He was always pleased to be addressed by Mr. Taxater, as indeed was everybody who knew him. The great scholar's detached intellectualism gave him an air of complete aloofness from all social distinctions.

"Perhaps I may have," he answered. "My mother used to hint at something of the kind. She was always very fond of foreign books. I rather fancy that I once heard her say something about a strain of Spanish blood."

"I thought so! I thought so!" cried Mr. Taxater, pulling his hat over his eyes and protruding his chin and under-lip, in the manner peculiar to him when especially pleased.

"I thought there was something Spanish in you. How extraordinarily interesting! Spain,—there is no country like it in the world! You must go to Spain, Mr. Andersen. You would go there in a different spirit from these wretched sight-seers who carry their own vulgarity with them. You would go with that feeling of reverence for the great things of civilization, which is inseparable from the least drop of Latin blood."

"Would *you* like to see Spain, Miss Traffio? enquired Vennie. "Mr. Taxater, I notice, always leaves out us women, when he makes his attractive proposals. I think he thinks that we have no capacity for understanding this civilization he talks of."

"I think you understand everything, better than any man could," murmured Lacrima, conscious of an extraordinary depth of sympathy emanating from this frail figure.

"Miss Seldom has been trying to make me appreciate the beauty of these orchards," went on Mr. Taxater, addressing James. "But I am afraid I am not very easily converted. I have a prejudice against orchards. For some reason or other, I associate them with dragons and serpents."

"Miss Seldom has every reason to love the beautiful aspects of our Nevilton scenery," said the stone-carver. "Her ancestors possessed all these fields and orchards so long, that it would be strange if their descendant did not have an instinctive passion for them." He uttered these words with that curious undertone of bitterness which marked all his references to aristocratic pretension.

Little Vennie brushed the sarcasm gently aside, as if it had been a fluttering moth.

"Yes, I do love them in a sense," she said, "but you must remember that I, too, was educated in a Latin country. So, you see, we four are all outsiders and heretics! I fancy your brother, Mr. Andersen, is an ingrained Neviltonian."

James smiled in a kindly, almost paternal manner, at the little descendant of the Tudor courtiers. Her sweetness and artless goodness made him feel ashamed of his furtive truculence.

"I wish you would come in and see my mother and me, one of these evenings," said Vennie, looking rather wistfully at Lacrima and putting a more tender solicitation into her tone than the mere words implied.

Lacrima hesitated. "I am afraid I cannot promise," she said nervously. "My cousin generally wants me in the evening."

"Perhaps," put in Mr. Taxater, with his most

Talleyrand-like air, "a similar occasion to the present one may arise again, when with Mr. Andersen's permission, we may all adjourn to the vicarage garden."

Lacrima, rather uncomfortably, looked down at the grass.

"We four, being, as we have admitted, all outsiders here," went on the diplomatist, "ought to have no secrets from one another. I think" — he looked at Vennie — "we may just as well confess to our friends that we quite realize the little — charming — 'friendship,' shall I say? — that has sprung up between this gentleman's brother and Miss Romer."

"I think," said James Andersen hurriedly, in order to relieve Lacrima's embarrassment, "I think the real bond between Luke and Miss Gladys is their mutual pleasure in all this luxuriant scenery. Somehow I feel as if you, sir, and Miss Seldom, were quite separate from it and outside it."

"Yes," cried Vennie eagerly, "and Lacrima is outside it, because she is half-Italian, and you are outside it because you are half-Spanish."

"It is clear, then," said Mr. Taxater, "that we four must form a sort of secret alliance, an alliance based upon the fact that even Miss Seldom's lovely orchards do not altogether make us forget what civilization means!"

Neither of the two girls seemed quite to understand what the theologian implied, but Andersen shot at him a gleam of appreciative gratitude.

"I was telling Miss Traffio," he said, "that under this grass, not very many feet down, a remarkable layer of sandstone obtrudes itself."

"An orchard based on rock," murmured Mr.

Taxater, "that, I think, is an admirable symbol of what this place represents. Clay at the top and sandstone at the bottom! I wonder whether it is better, in this world, to be clay or stone? We four poor foreigners have, I suspect, a preference for a material very different from both of these. Our element would be marble. Eh, Andersen? Marble that can resist all these corrupting natural forces and throw them back, and hold them down. I always think that marble is the appropriate medium of civilization's retort to instinct and savagery. The Latin races have always built in marble. It was certainly of marble that our Lord was thinking when he used his celebrated metaphor about the founding of the Church."

The stone-carver made no answer. He had noticed a quick supplicating glance from Lacrima's dark eyes.

"Well," — he said, "I think I must be looking for my brother, and I expect our young lady is waiting for Miss Traffio."

They bade their friends good-night and moved off.

"I am always at your service," were Mr. Taxater's last words, "if ever either of you care to appeal to the free-masonry of the children of marble against the children of clay."

As they retraced their steps Andersen remarked to his companion how curious it was, that neither Vennie nor Mr. Taxater seemed in the least aware of anything extraordinary or unconventional in this surreptitious friendship between the girls from the House and their father's workmen.

"Yes, I wonder what Mrs. Seldom would think of us," rejoined Lacrima, "but she probably thinks

Gladys is capable of anything and that I am as bad as she is. But I do like that little Vennie! I believe she is a real saint. She gives me such a queer feeling of being different from everyone."

"Mr. Taxater no doubt is making a convert of her," said the stone-carver. "And I have a suspicion that he hopes to convert Gladys too, probably through your influence."

"I don't like to think that of him," replied the girl. "He seems to me to admire Vennie for herself and to be kind to us for ourselves. I think he is a thoroughly good man."

"Possibly — possibly," muttered James, "but I don't trust him. I never have trusted him."

They said no more, and threaded their way slowly through the orchard to the place where they had left the others. The wind had dropped and there was a dull, obstinate expectancy in the atmosphere. Every leaf and grass blade seemed to be intently alert and listening.

In her heart Lacrima was conscious of an unusual sense of foreboding and apprehension. Surely there could be nothing worse in store for her than what she already suffered. She wondered what Maurice Quincunx was doing at that moment. Was he thinking of her, and were his thoughts the cause of this strange oppression in the air? Poor Maurice! She longed to be free to devote herself to him, to smooth his path, to distract his mind. Would fate ever make such a thing possible? How unfair Gladys was in her suspicions!

She liked James Andersen and was very grateful to him, but he did not need her as Maurice needed her!

"I see them!" she cried suddenly. "But how odd they look! They're not speaking a word. Have they quarrelled, I wonder?"

The two fair-haired amorists appeared indeed extremely gloomy and melancholy, as they sat, with a little space between them, on the fallen tree. They rose with an air of relief at the others' approach.

"I thought you were never coming," said Gladys. "How long you have been! We have been waiting for hours. Come along. We must go straight back and dress or we shall be late for dinner. No time for good-byes! Au revoir, you two! Come along, girl, quick! We'd better run."

She seized her cousin's hand and dragged her off and they were quickly out of sight.

The two brothers watched them disappear and then turned and walked away together. "Don't let's go home yet," said Luke. "Let's go to the churchyard first. The sun will have set, but it won't be dark for a long time. And I love the churchyard in the twilight."

James nodded. "It is our garden, isn't it, — and our orchard? It is the only spot in Nevilton where no one can interfere with us."

"That, and the Seldom Arms," added the younger brother.

They paced side by side in silence till they reached the road. The orchards, left to themselves, relapsed into their accustomed reserve. Whatever secrets they concealed of the confused struggles of ephemeral mortals, they concealed in inviolable discretion.

CHAPTER XI

ART AND NATURE

THE early days of June, all of them of the same quality of golden weather, were hardly over, before our wanderer from Ohio found himself on terms of quite pleasant familiarity with the celibate vicar of Nevilton, whose relations with his friend Gladys so immensely interested him.

The conscientious vicar had sought him out, on the very day after his visit to the mill copse, and the artist had found the priest more to his fancy than he had imagined possible.

The American's painting had begun in serious earnest. A studio had been constructed for him in one of the sheds near the conservatory, a place much more full of light and air and pleasant garden smells, than would have been the lumber-room referred to by Mrs. Romer, adjoining the chaste slumbers of the laborious Lily. Here for several long mornings he had worked at high pressure and in a vein of imaginative expansion.

Something of the seething sap of these incomparable days seemed to pass into his blood. He plunged into a bold and original series of Dionysic "impressions," seeking to represent, in accordance with his new vision, those legendary episodes in the life of the divine Wanderer which seemed most capable of lending

themselves to a half-realistic, half-fantastic transmutation, of the people and places immediately around him. He sought to introduce into these pictures the very impetus and pressure of the exuberant earth-force, as he felt it stirring and fermenting in his own veins, and in those of the persons and animals about him. He strove to clothe the shadowy poetic outline of the classical story with fragments and morsels of actual experience, as one by one his imaginative intellect absorbed them.

Here, too, under the sycamores and elms of Nevilton, the old world-madness followed the alternations of sun and moon, with the same tragic swiftness and the same ambiguous beauty, as when, with tossing arms and bared throats, the virgins of Thessaly flung themselves into the dew-starred thickets.

Dangelis began by making cautious and tentative use of such village children as he found it possible to lay hands upon, as models in his work, but this method did not prove very satisfactory.

The children, when their alarm and inqusitiveness wore off, grew tired and turbulent; and on more than one occasion the artist had to submit to astonishing visits from confused and angry parents who called him a "foreigner" and a "Yankee," and qualified these appelations with epithets so astoundingly gross, that Dangelis was driven to wonder from what simple city-bred fancy the illusion of rural innocence had first proceeded.

At length, as the days went on, the bold idea came into his head of persuading Gladys herself to act as his model.

His relations with her had firmly established them-

selves now on the secure ground of playful camaraderie, and he knew enough of her to feel tolerably certain that he had only to broach such a scheme, to have it welcomed with enthusiastic ardour.

He made the suggestion one evening as they walked home together after her spiritual lesson. "I find that last picture of mine extremely difficult to manage," he said.

"Why! I think its the best of them all!" cried Gladys. "You've got a lovely look of longing in the eyes of your queer god; and the sail of Theseus' ship, as you see it against the blue sea, is wonderful. The little bushes and things, too, you've put in; I like them particularly. They remind me of that wood down by the mill, where I caught the thrush. I suppose you've forgotten all about that day," she added, giving him a quick sidelong glance.

The artist seized his opportunity. "They would remind you still more of our wood," he said eagerly, "if you let me put you in as Ariádne! Do, Gladys," — he had called her Gladys for some days — "you will make a simply adorable Ariadne. As she is now, she is wooden, grotesque, archaic — nothing but drapery and white ankles!"

The girl had flushed with pleasure as soon as she caught the drift of his request. Now she glanced mischievously and mockingly at him.

"*My* ankles," she murmured laughing, "are not so very, very beautiful!"

"Please be serious, Gladys," he said, "I am really quite in earnest. It will just make the difference between a masterpiece and a fiasco."

"You are very conceited," she retorted teasingly,

"but I suppose I oughtn't to say that, ought I, as my precious ankles are to be a part of this masterpiece?"

She ran in front of him down the drive, and, as if to give him an exhibition of her goddess-like agility, caught at an over-hanging bough and swung herself backwards and forwards.

"What fun!" she cried, as he approached. "Of course I'll do it, Mr. Dangelis." Then, with a sudden change of tone and a very malign expression, as she let the branch swing back and resumed her place at his side, "Mr. Clavering must see me posing for you. He must say whether he thinks I'm good enough for Ariadne."

The artist looked a shade disconcerted by this unexpected turn to the project, but he was too anxious to make sure of his model to raise any premature objections. "But you must please understand," was all he said, "that I am very much in earnest about this picture. If anybody but myself *does* see you, there must be no teasing and fooling."

"Oh, I long for him to see me!" cried the girl. "I can just imagine his face, I can just imagine it!"

The artist frowned. "This is not a joke, Gladys. Mind you, if I do let Clavering into our secret, it'll be only on condition that you promise not to flirt with him. I shall want you to stay very still, — just as I put you."

Dangelis had never indicated before quite so plainly his blunt and unvarnished view of her relations with her spiritual adviser, and he now looked rather nervously at her to see how she received this intimation.

"I *love* teasing Mr. Clavering!" she cried savagely,

"I should like to tease him so much, that he never, never, would forget it!"

This extreme expression of feeling was a surprise, and by no means a pleasant one, to Ralph Dangelis.

"Why do you want so much to upset our friend?" he enquired.

"I suppose," she answered, still instinctively playing up to his idea of her naiveté and childishness, "it is because he thinks himself so good and so perfectly safe from falling in love with anyone — and that annoys me."

"Ha!" chuckled Dangelis, "so that's it, is it?" and he paced in thoughtful silence by her side until they reached the house.

The morning that followed this conversation was as warm as the preceding ones, but a strong southern wind had risen, with a remote touch of the sea in its gusty violence. The trees in the park, as the artist and his girl-friend watched them from the terrace, while Mr. Romer, who had now returned from town worked in his study, and Lacrima helped Mrs. Romer to "do the flowers," swayed and rustled ominously in the eddying gusts.

Clouds of dust kept blowing across the gates from the surface of the drive and the delphiniums bent low on their long stalks. The wind was of that peculiar character which, though hot and full of balmy scents, conveys a feeling of uneasiness and troubled expectation. It suggested thunder and with and beyond that, something threatening, calamitous and fatal.

Gladys was pre-occupied and gloomy that morning. She was growing a little, just a little, tired of

the American's conversation. Even the excitement of arranging about the purchase in Yeoborough of suitable materials for her Ariadne costume did not serve to lift the shadow from her brow.

She was getting tired of her rôle as the naive, impetuous and childish innocent; and though mentally still quite resolved upon following her mother's frequent and unblushing hints, and doing her best to "catch" this æsthetic master of a million dollars, the burden of the task was proving considerably irksome.

Ralph's growing tendency to take her into his confidence in the matter of the philosophy of his art, she found peculiarly annoying.

Philosophy of any kind was detestable to Gladys, and this particular sort of philosophy especially depressed her, by reducing the attraction of physical beauty to a kind of dispassionate analysis, against the chilling virtue of which all her amorous wiles hopelessly collapsed. It was becoming increasingly difficult, too, to secure her furtive interviews with Luke — interviews in which her cynical sensuality, suppressed in the society of the American, was allowed full swing.

Her thoughts, at this very moment, turned passionately and vehemently towards the young stone-carver, who had achieved, at last, the enviable triumph of seriously ruffling and disturbing her egoistic self-reliance.

Unused to suffering the least thwarting in what she desired, it fretted and chafed her intolerably to be forced to go on playing her coquettish part with this good-natured but inaccessible admirer, while all the time her soul yearned so desperately for the shame-

less kisses that made her forget everything in the world but the ecstacy of passion.

It was all very well to plan this posing as Ariadne and to listen to Dangelis discoursing on the beauty of pagan myths. The artist might talk endlessly about dryads and fauns. The faun she longed to be pursued by, this wind-swept morning, was now engaged in hammering Leonian stone, in her father's dusty work-shops.

She knew, she told herself, far better than the cleverest citizen of Ohio, what a real Greek god was like, both in his kindness and his unkindness; and her nerves quivered with irritation, as the hot southern wind blew upon her, to think that she would only be able, and even then for a miserably few minutes, to steal off to her true Dionysus, after submitting for a whole long day to this æsthetic foolery.

"It must have been a wind like this," remarked Dangelis, quite unobservant of his companion's moroseness, "which rocked the doomed palace of the blaspheming Pentheus and drove him forth to his fate." He paused a moment, pondering, and then added, "I shall paint a picture of this, Gladys. I shall bring in Tiresias and the other old men, feeling the madness coming upon them."

"I know all about that," the girl felt compelled to answer.

"They danced, didn't they? They couldn't help dancing, though they were so old and weak?"

Dangelis hardly required this encouragement, to launch into a long discourse upon the subject of Dionysian madness, its true symbolic meaning, its religious significance, its survival in modern times.

He quite forgot, as he gave himself up to this interesting topic, his recent resolution to exclude drastically from his work all these more definitely intellectualized symbols.

His companion's answers to this harangue became, by degrees, so obviously forced and perfunctory, that even the good-tempered Westerner found himself a little relieved when the appearance of Lacrima upon the scene gave him a different audience.

When Lacrima appeared, Gladys slipped away and Dangelis was left to do what he could to overcome the Italian's habitual shyness.

"One of these days," he said, looking with a kindly smile into the girl's frightened eyes, "I'm going to ask you, Miss Traffio, to take me to see your friend Mr. Quincunx."

Lacrima started violently. This was the last name she expected to hear mentioned on the Nevilton terrace.

"I — I — " she stammered, "I should be very glad to take you. I didn't know they had told you about him."

"Oh, they only told me — you can guess the kind of thing! — that he's a queer fellow who lives by himself in a cottage in Dead Man's Lane, and does nothing but dig in his garden and talk to old women over the wall. He's evidently one of these odd out-of-the-way characters, that your English — Oh, I beg your pardon! — your European villages produce. Mr. Clavering told me he is the only man in the place he never goes to see. Apparently he once insulted the good vicar."

"He didn't insult him!" cried Lacrima with flashing

eyes. "He only asked him not to walk on his potatoes. Mr. Clavering is too touchy."

"Well — anyway, do take me, sometime, to see this interesting person. Why shouldn't we go this afternoon? This wind seems to have driven all the ideas out of my head, as well as made your cousin extremely bad-tempered! So do take me to see your friend, Miss Traffio! We might go now — this moment — why not?"

Lacrima shook her head, but she looked grateful and not displeased. As a matter of fact she was particularly anxious to introduce the American to Mr. Quincunx. In that vague subtle way which is a peculiarity, not only of the Pariah-type, but of human nature in general, she was anxious that Dangelis should be given at least a passing glimpse of another view of the Romer family.

It was not that she was definitely plotting against her cousin or trying to undermine her position with her artist-friend, but she felt a natural human desire that this sympathetic and good-tempered man should be put, to some extent at least, upon his guard.

She was, at any rate, not at all unwilling to initiate him into the mysteries of Mr. Quincunx' mind, hoping, perhaps, in an obscure sort of way, that such an initiation would throw her own position, in this strange household, into a light more evocative of considerate interest.

She had been so often made conscious of late that in his absorption in Gladys he had swept her brusquely aside as a dull and tiresome spoil-sport, that it was not without a certain feminine eagerness that she

embraced the thought of his being compelled to listen to what she well knew Mr. Quincunx would have to say upon the matter.

It was also an agreeable thought that in doing justice to the originality and depth of the recluse's intelligence, the American would be driven to recognize the essentially unintellectual tone of conversation at Nevilton House.

She instinctively felt sure that the same generous and comprehensive sympathy that led him to condone the vulgar lapses of these "new people," would lead him to embrace with more than toleration the eccentricities and aberration of the forlorn relative of the Lords of Glastonbury.

With these thoughts passing rapidly through her brain, Lacrima found herself, after a little further hesitation, agreeing demurely to the American's proposal to visit the tenant of Dead Man's Lane before the end of the day. She left it uncertain at what precise hour they should go — probably between tea and dinner — because she was anxious, for her own sake, dreading her cousin's anger, to make the adventure synchronize, if possible, with the latter's assignation with Luke, trusting that the good turn she thus did her, by removing her artistic admirer at a critical juncture, would propitiate the fair-haired tyrant's wrath.

This matter having been satisfactorily settled, the Italian began to feel, as she observed the artist's bold and challenging glance embracing her from head to foot, while he continued to this new and more attentive listener his interrupted monologue, that species of shy and nervous restraint which invariably embarrassed her when left alone in his society.

Inexperienced at detecting the difference between æsthetic interest and emotional interest, and associating the latter with nothing but what was brutal and gross, Lacrima experienced a disconcerting sort of shame when under the scrutiny of his eyes.

Her timid comments upon his observations showed, however, so much more subtle insight into his meaning than Gladys had ever displayed, that it was with a genuine sense of regret that he accepted at last some trifling excuse she offered and let her wander away. Feeling restless and in need of distraction he returned to the house and sought the society of Mrs. Romer.

He discovered this good lady seated in the housekeeper's room, perusing an illustrated paper and commenting upon its contents to the portly Mrs. Murphy. The latter discreetly withdrew on the appearance of the guest of the house, and Dangelis entered into conversation with his hostess.

"Maurice Quincunx!" she cried, as soon as her visitor mentioned the recluse's queer name, "you don't mean to say that Lacrima's going to take you to see *him*? Well — of all the nonsensical ideas I ever heard! You'd better not tell Mortimer where you're going. He's just now very angry with Maurice. It won't please him at all, her taking you there. Maurice is related to me, you know, not to Mr. Romer. Mr. Romer has never liked him, and lately — but there! I needn't go into all that. We used to see quite a lot of him in the old days, when we first came to Nevilton. I like to have someone about, you know, and Maurice was somebody to talk to, when Mr. Romer was away; but lately

things have been quite different. It is all very sad and very tiresome, you know, but what can a person do?"

This was the nearest approach to a hint of divergence between the master and mistress of Nevilton that Dangelis had ever been witness to, and even this may have been misleading, for the shrewd little eyes, out of which the lady peered at him, over her spectacles, were more expressive of mild malignity than of moral indignation.

"But what kind of person is this Mr. Quincunx?" enquired the American. "I confess I can't, so far, get any clear vision of his personality. Won't you tell me something more definite about him, something that will 'give me a line on him,' as we say in the States?"

Mrs. Romer looked a trifle bewildered. It seemed that the personality of Mr. Quincunx was not a topic that excited her conversational powers.

"I never really cared for him," she finally remarked. "He used to talk so unnaturally. He'd come over here, you know, almost every day — when Gladys was a little girl, — and talk and talk and talk. I used to think sometimes he wasn't quite right here," — the good lady tapped her forehead with her forefinger, — "but in some things he was very sensible. I don't mean that he spoke loud or shouted or was noisy. Sometimes he didn't say very much; but even when he didn't speak, his listening was like talking. Gladys used to be quite fond of him when she was a little girl. He used to play hide-and-seek with her in the garden. I think he helped me to keep her out of mischief more than any of her governesses did. Once, you know, he beat Tom Raggles

— the miller's son — because he followed her across the park — beat him over the head, they say, with an iron pick. The lying wretch of a lad swore that she had encouraged him, and we were driven to hush the matter up, but I believe Mr. Quincunx had to see the inspector in Yeoborough."

Beyond this somewhat obscure incident, Dangelis found it impossible to draw from Mrs. Romer any intelligible answer to his questions. The figure of the evasive tenant of the cottage in Dead Man's Lane remained as misty as ever.

A little irritated by the ill success of his psychological investigations, the artist, conscious that he was wasting the morning, began, out of sheer capricious wilfulness, to expound his æsthetic ideas to this third interlocutor.

His nerves were in a morbid and unbalanced state, due partly to a lapse in his creative energy, and partly to the fact that in the depths of his mind he was engaged in a half-conscious struggle to suppress and keep in its proper place the insidious physical attraction which Gladys had already begun to exert upon him.

But the destiny of poor Dangelis, this inauspicious morning, was, it seemed, to become a bore and a pedant to everyone he encountered; for the lady had hardly listened for two minutes to his discourse when she also left him, with some suitable apology, and went off to perform more practical household duties. "What did this worthy Quincunx talk about, that you used to find so tiresome?" the artist flung after her, as she left the room.

Mrs. Romer turned on the threshold. "He talked

of nothing but the bible," she said. "The bible and our blessed Lord. You can't blame me, Mr. Dangelis, for objecting to that sort of thing, can you? I call it blasphemy, nothing short of blasphemy!"

Dangelis wondered, as he strolled out again into the air, intending to seek solace for his irritable nerves in a solitary walk, whether, if it were blasphemy in Nevilton House to refer to the Redeemer of men, and a nuisance and a bore to refer to heathen idolatries, what kind of topic it might be that the place's mental atmosphere demanded.

He came to the conclusion, as he proceeded down the west drive, that the Romer family was more stimulating to watch, than edifying to converse with.

After tea that evening, as Lacrima had hoped, Gladys announced her intention of going down to the mill to sketch. This — to Lacrima's initiated ears — meant an assignation with Luke, and she glanced quickly at Dangelis, with a shy smile, to indicate that their projected visit was possible. As soon as her cousin had departed they set out. Their expedition seemed likely to prove a complete success. They found Mr. Quincunx in one of his gayest moods. Had he been expecting the appearance of the American he would probably have worked himself up into a miserable state of nervous apprehension; but the introduction thus suddenly thrust upon him, the genial simplicity of the Westerner's manners and his honest openness of speech disarmed him completely. In a mood of this kind the recluse became a charming companion.

Dangelis was immensely delighted with him. His original remarks, and the quaint chuckling bursts of

sardonic laughter which accompanied his irresistible sallies, struck the artist as something completely different from what he had expected. He had looked to see a listless preoccupied mystic, ready to flood him with dreamy and wearisome monologues upon "the simple life," and in place of this he found an entertaining and gracious gentleman, full of delicious malice, and uttering quip after quip of sly, half-innocent, half-subtle, Rabelaisean humour, in the most natural manner in the world.

Not quite able to bring his affability to the point of inviting them into his kitchen, Mr. Quincunx carried out, into a sheltered corner, three rickety chairs and a small deal table. Here, protected from the gusty wind, he offered them cups of exquisitely prepared cocoa and little oatmeal biscuits. He asked the American question after question about his life in the remote continent, putting into his enquiries such naive and childlike eagerness, that Dangelis congratulated himself upon having at last discovered an Englishman who was not superior to the charming vice of curiosity. Had the artist possessed less of that large and careless aplomb which makes the utmost of every situation and never teases itself with criticism, he might have regarded the recluse's effusiveness as too deprecatory and propitiatory in its tone. This, however, never occurred to him and he swallowed the solitary's flattery with joy and gratitude, especially as it followed so quickly upon the conversational deficiencies of Nevilton House.

"I live in the mud here," said Mr. Quincunx, "and that makes it so excellent of you two people from

the upper world to slip down into the mud with me."

"I think you live very happily and very sensibly, Maurice!" cried Lacrima, looking with tender affection upon her friend. "I wish we could all live as you do."

The recluse waved his hand. "There must be lions and antelopes in the world," he said, "as well as frogs and toads. I expect this friend of yours, who has seen the great cities, is at this moment wishing he were in a café in New York or Paris, rather than sitting on a shaky chair drinking my bad cocoa."

"That's not very complimentary to me, is it, Mr. Dangelis?" said Lacrima.

"Mr. Quincunx is much to be envied," remarked the American. "He is living the sort of life that every man of sense would wish to live. It's outrageous, the way we let ourselves become slave to objects and circumstances and people."

Lacrima, anxious in the depths of her heart to give the American the benefit of Mr. Quincunx's insight into character, turned the conversation in the direction of the rumored political contest between Romer and Wone. She was not quite pleased with the result of this manœuvre, however, as it at once diminished the solitary's high spirits and led to his adoption of the familiar querulous tone of peevish carping.

Mr. Quincunx spoke of his remoteness from the life around him. He referred with bitter sarcasm to the obsequious worship of power from which every inhabitant of the village of Nevilton suffered.

"I laugh," he said, "when our good socialist Wone gives vent to his eloquent protestations. Really, in his heart, he is liable to just the same cringing to power as all the rest. Let Romer make overtures to him, — only he despises him too much to do that, — and you'd soon see how quickly he'd swing round! Give him a position of power, Dangelis — I expect you know from your experience in your own country how this works out, — and you would soon find him just as tyrannical, just as obdurate."

"I think you're quite wrong, Maurice," cried Lacrima impetuously. "Mr. Wone is not an educated man as you are, but he's entirely sincere. You've only to listen to him to understand his sincerity."

A grievous shadow of irritation and pique crossed the recluse's face. Nothing annoyed him more than this kind of direct opposition. He waved the objection aside. Lacrima's outburst of honest feeling had already undone the subtle purpose with which she had brought the American. Her evasive Balaam was, it appeared, inclined, out of pure wilfulness, to bless rather than curse their grand enemy.

"It's all injured vanity," Mr. Quincunx went on, throwing at his luckless girl-friend a look of quite disproportioned anger. "Its all his outraged power-instinct that drives him to take up this pose. I know what I'm talking about, for I often argue with him. Whenever I dispute the smallest point of his theories, he bursts out like a demon and despises me as a downright fool. He'd have got me turned out of the Social Meetings, because I contradicted him there, if our worthy clergyman hadn't intervened. You've no idea how deep this power-instinct goes. You must

remember, Mr. Dangelis, you see a village like ours entirely from the outside and you think it beautiful, and the people charming and gentle. I tell you it's a nest of rattlesnakes! It's a narrow, poisonous cage, full of deadly vindictiveness and concentrated malice. Of course we know what human nature is, wherever you find it, but if you want to find it at its very worst, come to Nevilton!"

"But you yourself," protested the artist, "are you not one of these same people? I understand that you — "

Mr. Quincunx rose to his feet, his expressive nostrils quivering with anger. "I don't allow anyone to say that of me!" he cried, "I may have my faults, but I'm as different from all these rats as a guillemot is different from a cormorant!"

He sat down again and his voice took almost a pleading tone. "You know I'm different. You must know I'm different! How could I see all these things as clearly as I do if it wasn't so? I've undergone what that German calls 'the Great Renunciation.' I've escaped the will to live. I neither care to acquire myself this accursed power — or to revolt, in jealous envy, against those who possess it."

He relapsed into silence and contemplated his garden and its enclosing hedge, with a look of profound melancholy. Dangelis had been considerably distracted during the latter part of this discourse by his artistic interest in the delicate lines of Lacrima's figure and the wistful sadness of her expression. It was borne in upon him that he had somewhat neglected this shy cousin of his exuberant young friend. He promised himself to see more of the Italian, as

occasion served. Perhaps — if only Gladys would agree to it — he might make use of her, also, in his Dionysian impressions.

"Surely," he remarked, speaking with the surface of his intelligence, and pondering all the while upon the secret of Lacrima's charm, "whatever this man may be, he's not a hypocrite, — is he? From all I hear he's pathetically in earnest."

"Of course we know he's in earnest," answered Maurice. "What I maintain is, that it is his personal vindictiveness that creates his opinions. I believe he would derive genuine pleasure from seeing Nevilton House burnt to the ground, and every one of the people in it reduced to ashes!"

"That proves his sincerity," answered the American, keeping his gaze fixed so intently upon Lacrima that the girl began to be embarrassed.

"He takes the view-point, no doubt, that if the present oligarchy in England were entirely destroyed, a new and happier epoch would begin at once."

"I'm sure Mr. Wone is opposed to every kind of violence," threw in Lacrima.

"Nonsense!" cried Mr. Quincunx abruptly. "He may not like violence because he's afraid of it reacting on himself. But what he wants to do is to humiliate everyone above him, to disturb them, to prod them, to harass and distress them, and if possible to bring them down to his own level. He's got his thumb on Lacrima's friends over there," — he waved his hand in the direction of Nevilton House, — "because they happen to be at the top of the tree at this moment. But if you or I were there, it would be just the same. It's all

jealousy. That's what it is, — jealousy and envy! He wants to make every one who's prosperous and eats meat, and drinks champagne, know what it is to live a dog's life, as he has known it himself! I understand his feelings very well. We poor toads, who live in the mud, get extraordinary pleasure when any of you grand gentlemen slip by accident into our dirty pond. He sees such people enjoying themselves and being happy and he wants to stick a few pins into them!"

"But why not, my good sir?" answered the American. "Why shouldn't Wone use all his energy to crush Romer, just as Romer uses all his energy to crush Wone?"

Lacrima sighed. "I don't think either of you make this world seem a very nice place," she observed.

"A nice place?" cried Mr. Quincunx. "It's a place poisoned at the root — a place full of gall and wormwood!"

"In my humble opinion," said the American, "it's a splendid world. I love to see these little struggles and contests going on. I love to see the delicious inconsistences and self-deceptions that we're all guilty of. I play the game myself, and I love to see others play it. Its the only thing I do love, except —" he added after a pause— "except my pictures."

"I loathe the game," retorted the recluse, "and I find it impossible to live with people who do not loathe it too."

"Well — all I can say, my friend," observed Dangelis, "is that this business of 'renouncing,' of which you talk, doesn't appeal to me. It strikes me as

a backing down and scurrying away, from the splendid adventure of being alive at all. What are you alive for," he added, "if you are going to condemn the natural combatative instinct of men and women as evil and horrible? They are the instincts by which we live. They are the motives that propel the whole universe."

"Mr. Wone would say," interposed Lacrima, "and I'm not sure that I don't agree with him, that the real secret of the universe is deeper than all these unhappy struggles. I don't like the unctuous way he puts these things, but he may be right all the same."

"There's no secret of the universe, Miss Traffio," the American threw in. "There are many things we don't understand. But no one principle, — not even the principle of love itself, can be allowed to monopolize the whole field. Life, I always feel, is better interpreted by Art than by anything else, and Art is equally interested in every kind of energy."

Lacrima's face clouded, and her hands fell wearily upon her lap.

"Some sorts of energy," she observed, in a low voice, "are brutal and dreadful. If Art expresses that kind, I'm afraid I don't care for Art."

The American gave her a quick, puzzled glance. There was a sorrowful intensity about her tone which he found difficult to understand.

"What I meant was," he said, "that logically we can only do one of two things, — either join in the game and fight fiercely and craftily for our own hand, or take a convenient drop of poison and end the whole affair."

The melancholy eyes of Mr. Quincunx opened very wide at this, and a fluttering smile twitched the corners of his mouth.

"We poor dogs," he said, "who are not wanted in this world, and don't believe in any other, are just the people who are most unwilling to finish ourselves off in the way you suggest. We can't help a sort of sneaking hope, that somehow or another, through no effort of our own, things will become better for us. The same cowardice that makes us draw back from life, makes us draw back from the thought of death. Can't you understand that, — you American citizen?"

Dangelis looked from one to another of his companions. He could not help thinking in his heart of the gay animated crowds, who, at that very moment, in the streets of Toledo, Ohio, were pouring along the side-walks and flooding the picture shows. These quaint Europeans, for all their historic surroundings, were certainly lacking in the joy of life.

"I can't conceive," remarked Mr. Quincunx suddenly, and with that amazing candour which distinguished him, "how a person as artistic and sensitive as you are, can stay with those people over there. Anyone can see that you're as different from them as light from darkness."

"My dear sir," replied the American, interrupting a feeble little protest which Lacrima was beginning to make at the indiscretion of her friend, "I may or may not understand your wonder. The point is, that my whole principle of life is to deal boldly and freely with every kind of person. Can't you see that I like to look on at the spectacle of Mr. Romer's

energy and prosperity, just as I like to look on at the revolt against these things in the mind of our friend Wone. I tell you it tickles my fancy to touch this human pantomime on every possible side. The more unjust Romer is towards Wone, the more I am amused. And the more unjust Wone is towards Romer, the more I am amused. It is out of the clash of these opposite injustices that nature, — how shall I put it? — that nature expands and grows."

Mr. Quincunx gazed at the utterer of these antinomian sentiments, with humorous interest. Dangelis gathered, from the twitching of his heavy moustache, that he was chuckling like a goblin. The queer fellow had a way of emerging out of his melancholy, at certain moments, like a badger out of his hole; and at such times he would bring the most ideal or speculative conversation down with a jerk to the very bed-rock of reality.

"What's amusing you so?" enquired the citizen of Ohio.

"I was only thinking," chuckled Mr. Quincunx, stroking his beard, and glancing sardonically at Lacrima, "that the real reason of your enjoying yourself at Nevilton House, is quite a different one from any you have mentioned."

Dangelis was for the moment quite confused. "Confound the fellow!" he muttered to himself, "I'm curst if I'm sorry he's under the thumb of our friend Romer!"

His equanimity was soon restored, however, and he covered his confusion by assuming a light and flippant air.

"Ha! ha!" he exclaimed, "so you're thinking I've

been caught by this young lady's cousin? Well! I don't mind confessing that we get on beautifully together. But as for anything else, I think Miss Traffio will bear witness that I am quite as devoted to the mother as the daughter. But Gladys Romer must be admitted a very attractive girl, — mustn't she Miss Traffio? I suppose our friend here is not so stern an ascetic as to refuse an artist like me the pleasure of admiring such adorable suppleness as your cousin possesses; such a — such a —" he waved his hand vaguely in the air, "such a free and flexible sort of grace?"

Mr. Quincunx picked up a rough ash stick which lay on the ground and prodded the earth. His face showed signs of growing once more convulsed with indecent merriment.

"Why do you use all those long words?" he said. "We country dogs go more straight to the point in these matters. Flexible grace! Can't you confess that you're bitten by the old Satan, which we all have in us? Adorable suppleness! Why can't you say a buxom wench, a roguish wench, a playful wanton wench? We country fellows don't understand your subtle artistic expressions. But we know what it is when an honest foreigner like yourself goes walking and talking with a person like Madame Gladys!"

Glancing apprehensively at the American's face Lacrima saw that her friend's rudeness had made him, this time, seriously angry.

She rose from her chair. "We must be getting back," she said, "or we shall be late. I hope you and Mr. Dangelis will know more of one another, before

he has to leave Nevilton. I'm sure you'll find that you've quite a lot in common, when you really begin to understand each other."

The gravity and earnestness with which she uttered these words made both her companions feel a little ashamed.

"After all," thought the artist, "he is a typical Englishman."

"After all," thought Mr. Quincunx, "I've always been told that Americans treat women as if they were made of tissue-paper."

Their parting from the recluse at his garden gate was friendly and natural. Mr. Quincunx reverted to his politest manner, and the artist's good temper seemed quite restored.

In retrospect, after the passing of a couple of days, spent by Dangelis in preparing the accessories of his Ariadne picture, and by Gladys in unpacking certain mysterious parcels telegraphed for to London, the American found himself recalling his visit to Dead Man's Cottage with none but amiable feelings. The third morning which followed this visit, dawned upon Nevilton with peculiar propitiousness. The air was windless and full of delicious fragrance. The bright clear sunshine seemed to penetrate every portion of the spacious Elizabethan mansion and to turn its corridors and halls, filled with freshly plucked flowers, into a sort of colossal garden house.

Dangelis rose that morning with a more than normal desire to plunge into his work. He was considerably annoyed, however, to find that Gladys had actually arranged to have Mr. Clavering invited to lunch and had gone so far as to add a pencilled scrawl

of her own — she herself laughingly confessed as much — to her mother's formal note, begging him to appear in the middle of the forenoon, as she had a "surprise" in store for him.

The American's anxiety to begin work as soon as possible with his attractive model, made him suffer miseries of impatience, while Gladys amused herself with her Ariadne draperies, making Lacrima dress and undress her twenty times, behind the screens of the studio.

She appeared at last, however, and the artist, looking up at her from his canvas, was for the moment staggered by her beauty. The instinctive taste of her cousin's Latin fingers was shown in the exquisite skill with which the classical folds of the dress she wore accentuated the natural charm of her young form.

The stuff of which her chief garment was made was of a deep gentian blue and the contrast between this color and the dazzling whiteness of her neck and arms was enough to ravish not only the æsthetic soul in the man but his more human senses also. Her bare feet were encased in white sandals, bound by slender leathern straps, which were twisted round her legs almost as high as the knee. A thin metal band, of burnished bronze, was clasped about her head and over and under this, her magnificent sun-coloured hair flowed, in easy and natural waves, to where it was caught up, in a Grecian knot, above the nape of her neck. Save for this band round her head she wore no clasps or jewelry of any kind, and the softness of her flesh was made more emphatic by the somewhat rough and coarse texture of her loosely

folded drapery. Dangelis was so lost in admiration of this delicious apparition, that he hardly noticed Lacrima's timid farewell, as the Italian slipped away into the garden and left them together. It was indeed not till Gladys had descended from the little wooden platform and coyly approached the side of his easel, that the artist recovered himself.

"Upon my soul, but you look perfectly wonderful!" he cried enthusiastically. "Quick! Let's to business. I want to get well started, before we have any interruption."

He led her back to the platform, and made her lean in a semi-recumbent position upon a cushioned bench which he had prepared for the purpose. He took a long time to satisfy himself as to her precise pose, but at last, with a lucky flash of inspiration, and not without assistance from Gladys herself, whose want of æsthetic feeling was compensated for in this case by the profoundest of all feminine instincts, he found for her the inevitable, the supremely effective, position. It was with a thrill of exquisite sweetness, pervading both soul and senses, that he began painting her. He felt as though this were one of the few flawless and unalloyed moments of his life. Everything in him and about him seemed to vibrate and quiver in response to the breath of beauty and youth. Penetrated by the delicate glow of a passion which was free, at present, from the sting of sensual craving, he felt as though all the accumulative impressions, of a long procession of harmonious days, were summed up and focussed in this fortunate hour. The loveliness of the young girl, as he transferred it, curve by curve, shadow by shadow, to his canvas,

seemed expressive of a reserved secret of enchantment, until this moment withheld and concealed from him. The ravishing contours of her lithe figure seemed to open up, to his magnetized imagination, vistas and corridors of emotion, such as he had never even dreamed of experiencing. She was more than a supremely lovely girl. She was the very epitome and incarnation of all those sunward striving forces and impulses, which, rising from the creative heart of the universe, struggle upwards through the resisting darkness. She was a Sun-child, a creature of air and earth and fire, a daughter of Circe and Dionysus; and as he drained the so frankly offered philtre of her intoxicating beauty, and flung his whole soul's response to it in glowing color upon the canvas, he felt that he would never again thus catch the fates asleep, or thus plunge his hands into the nectar of the supreme gods.

The world presented itself to him at that moment, while he swept his brush with fierce passionate energy across the canvas, as bathed in translucent and unclouded ether. Everything it contained, of weakness and decadence, of gloom and misgiving, seemed to be transfigured, illuminated, swallowed up. He felt as though, in thus touching the very secret of divine joy, held in the lap of the abysmal mothers, nothing but energy and beauty and creative force would ever concern or occupy him again. All else, — all scruples, all questions, all problems, all renunciations — seemed but irrelevant and negligible vapour, compared with this glorious and sun-lit stream of life. He worked on feverishly at his task. By degrees, and in so incredibly a short time that Gladys herself

was astonished when he told her she could rest and stretch herself a little, the figure of the Ariadne he had seen in his imagination limned itself against the expectant background. He was preparing to resume his labour, and Gladys, after a boyish scramble into the neighbouring conservatory, and an eager return to the artist's side with a handful of early strawberries, was just re-mounting the platform, when the door of the studio opened and Hugh Clavering entered.

He had been almost inclined, — in so morbid a condition were his nerves — to knock at the door before coming in, but a lucky after-thought had reminded him that such an action would have been scandalously inappropriate.

Assuming an air of boyish familiarity, which harmonized better perhaps with her leather-bound ankles than with her girlish figure, Gladys jumped down at once from the little stage and ran gaily to welcome him. She held out her hand, and then, raising both her arms to her head and smoothing back her bright hair beneath its circlet of bronze, she inquired of him, in a soft low murmur, whether he thought she looked "nice."

Clavering was struck dumb. He had all those shivering sensations of trembling agitation which are described with such realistic emphasis in the fragmentary poem of Sappho. The playful girl, her fair cheeks flushed with excitement and a treacherous light in her blue eyes, swung herself upon the rough oak table that stood in the middle of the room, and sat there, smiling coyly at him, dangling her sandalled feet. She still held in her hand the strawberries she had picked; and as, with childish gusto, she put one after another of these between her lips, she looked at

him with an indescribable air of mischievous, challenging defiance.

"So this is the pagan thing," thought the poor priest, "that it is my duty to initiate into the religion of sacrifice!"

He could not prevent the passing through his brain of a grotesque and fantastic vision in which he saw himself, like a second hermit of the Thebaid, leading this equivocal modern Thais to the waters of Jordan. Certainly the association of such a mocking white-armed darling of errant gods with the ceremony of confirmation was an image somewhat difficult to embrace! The impatient artist, apologizing profusely to the embarrassed visitor, soon dragged off his model to her couch on the platform, and it fell to the lot of the infatuated priest to subside in paralyzed helplessness, on a modest seat at the back of the room. What thoughts, what wild unpermitted thoughts, chased one another in strange procession through his soul, as he stared at the beautiful heathen figure thus presented to his gaze!

The movements of the artist, the heavy stream of sunlight falling aslant the room, the sweet exotic smells borne in from the window opening on the conservatory, seemed all to float and waver about him, as though they were things felt by a deep-sea diver beneath a weight of humming waters. He gave himself up completely to what that moment brought.

Faith, piety, sacrifice, devotion, became for him mere words and phrases — broken, fragmentary, unmeaning — sounds heard in the shadow-land of sleep, vague and indistinct like the murmur of drowned bells under a brimming tide.

It may well be believed that the languorously reclining model was not in the least oblivious to the effect she produced. This was, indeed, one of Gladys' supreme moments, and she let no single drop of its honeyed distillation pass undrained. She permitted her heavy-lidded blue eyes, suffused with a soft dreamy mist, to rest tenderly on her impassioned lover; and as if in response to the desperate longing in his look, a light-fluttering, half-wistful smile crossed her parted lips, like a ripple upon a shadowy stream.

The girl's vivid consciousness of the ecstasy of power was indeed, in spite of her apparent lethargic passivity, never more insanely aroused. Lurking beneath the dreamy sweetness of the look with which she responded to Clavering's magnetized gaze, were furtive depths of Circean remorselessness. Under her gentian-blue robe her youthful breast trembled with exultant pleasure, and she felt as though, with every delicious breath she drew, she were drinking to the dregs the very wine of the immortals.

"I must give Mr. Clavering some strawberries!" she suddenly cried, jumping to her feet, and breaking both the emotional and the æsthetic spell as if they were gossamer-threads. "He looks bored and tired."

In vain the disconcerted artist uttered an imploring groan of dismay, as thus, at the critical moment, his model betrayed him. In vain the bewildered priest professed his complete innocence of any wish for strawberries.

The wayward girl clambered once more through the conservatory window, at the risk of spoiling her Olympian attire, and returning with a handful of fruit, tripped coquettishly up to both of

them in turn and insisted on their dividing the spoil.

Had either of the two men been in a mood for classical reminiscences, the famous image of Circe feeding her transformed lovers might have been irresistibly evoked. They were all three thus occupied, — the girl in the highest spirits, and both men feeling a little sulky and embarrassed, when, to the general consternation, the door began slowly to open, and a withered female figure, clad in a ragged shawl and a still more dilapidated skirt made its entry into the room.

"Why, it's Witch-Bessie!" cried Gladys, involuntarily clutching at Clavering's arm. "Wicked old thing! She gave me quite a start. Well, Bessie, what do you want here? Don't you know the way to the back door? You mustn't come round to the front like this. What do you want?"

Each of the model's companions made a characteristic movement. Dangelis began feeling in his pocket for some suitable coin, and Clavering raised his hand with an half-reproachful, half-conciliatory, and altogether pastoral gesture, as if at the same time threatening and welcoming a lost sheep of his flock.

But Witch-Bessie had only eyes for Gladys. She stared in petrified amazement at the gentian-blue robe and the boyish sandals.

"Send her away!" whispered the girl to Mr. Clavering. "Tell her to go to the back door. They'll give her food and things there."

The cadaverous stare of the old woman relaxed at last. Fixing her colourless eyes on the two men,

and pointing at Gladys with her skinny hand, she cried, in a shrill, querulous voice, that rang unpleasantly through the studio, "What be she then, touzled up in like of this? What be she then, with her Jezebel face and her shameless looks? Round to back door, is it, 'ee 'd have me sent? I do know who you be, well enough, Master Clavering, and I do guess this gentleman be him as they say does bide here; but what be she, tricketed up in them outlandish clothes, like a Gypoo from Roger-town Fair? Be she Miss Gladys Romer, or baint she?"

"Come, Bessie," said Clavering in propitiatory tone. "Do as the young lady says and go round to the back. I'll go with you if you like. I expect they'll have plenty of scraps for you in that big kitchen."

He laid his hand on the old woman's shoulder and tried to usher her out. But she turned on him angrily. "Scraps!" she cried. "Scraps thee own self! What does the like of a pair of gentlemen such as ye be, flitter-mousing and flandering round, with a hussy like she?"

She turned furiously upon Gladys, waving aside with a snort of contempt the silver coin which Dangelis, with a vague notion that "typical English beggars" should be cajoled with gifts, sought to press into her hand.

"'Twas to speak a bit of my mind to 'ee, not to beg at your blarsted back door that I did come this fine morning! Us that do travel by night and by day hears precious strange things sometimes. What for, my fine lady, did ye go and swear to policeman Frank, down in Nevilton, that 'twas I took your God-

darned pigeons? Your dad may be a swinking magistrate, what can send poor folks to gaol for snaring rabbities, or putting a partridge in the pot to make the cabbage tasty, but what right does that give a hussy like thee to send policeman Frank swearing he'll lock up old Bessie? It don't suit wi' I, this kind of flummery; so I do tell 'ee plain and straight. It don't suit wi' I!"

"Come, clear out of this, my good woman!" cried the indignant clergyman, seizing the trembling old creature by the arm.

"Don't hurt her! Don't hurt her!" exclaimed Gladys. "She'll put the evil eye on me. She did it to Nance Purvis and she's been mad ever since."

"It's a lie!" whimpered the old woman, struggling feebly as Clavering pulled her towards the door.

"It's your own dad and Nance's dad with their ugly ways what have driven that poor lass moon-crazy. Mark Purvis do whip her with withy sticks — all the country knows it. Darn 'ee, for a black devil's spawn, and no blessed minister, pulling and harrying an old woman!"

This last ejaculation was addressed to the furious Mr. Clavering, who was now thrusting her by bodily force through the open door. With one final effort Witch-Bessie broke loose from him and turned on the threshold. "Ye *shall* have the evil eye, since ye've called for it," she shrieked, making a wild gesture in the air, in the direction of the shrinking Ariadne. "And what if I let these two gentlemen know with whom it was ye were out walking the other night? I did see 'ee, and I do know what I did see! I'm a pigeon-stealer am I, ye flaunting flandering

Gypoo? Let me tell these dear gentlemen how as —" Her voice died suddenly away in an incoherent splutter, as the vicar of Nevilton, with his hand upon her mouth, swung her out of the door.

Gladys sank down upon a chair pale and trembling.

As soon, however, as the old woman's departure seemed final, she began to recover her equanimity. She gave vent to a rather forced and uneasy laugh. "Silly old thing!" she exclaimed. "This comes of mother's getting rid of the dogs. She never used to come here when we had the dogs. They scented her out in a minute. I wish we had them now to let loose at her! They'd make her skip."

"I do hope, my dear child," said Dangelis anxiously, "that she has not really frightened you? What a terrible old creature! I've always longed to see a typical English witch, but bless my heart if I want to see another!"

"She's gone now," announced Mr. Clavering, returning hot and breathless. "I saw her half-way down the drive. She'll be out of sight directly. I expect you don't want to see any more of her, else, if you come out here a step or two, you can see her slinking away."

Gladys thanked him warmly for his energetic defence of her, but denied having the least wish to witness her enemy's retreat.

"It must be getting near lunch time," she said. "If you don't mind waiting a moment, I'll change my dress." And she tripped off behind the screens.

CHAPTER XII

AUBER LAKE

THE presence of Ralph Dangelis in Nevilton House had altered, in more than one respect, the relations between Gladys and her cousin.

The girls saw much less of each other, and Lacrima was left comparatively at liberty to follow her own devices.

On several occasions, however, when they were all three together, it chanced that the American had made himself extremely agreeable to the younger girl, even going so far as to take her part, quite energetically, in certain lively discussions. These occasions were not forgotten by Gladys, and she hated the Italian with a hatred more deep-rooted than ever.

As soon as her first interest in the American's society began to pall a little, she cast about in her mind for some further way of causing discomfort and agitation to the object of her hatred.

Only those who have taken the trouble to watch carefully what might be called the "magnetic antagonism," between feminine animals condemned to live in close relations with one another, will understand the full intensity of what this young person felt. It was not necessarily a sign of any abnormal morbidity in our fair-haired friend.

For a man in whom one is interested, even though

such interest be mild and casual, to show a definite tendency to take sides against one, on behalf of one's friend, is a sufficient justification, — at least so nature seems to indicate — for the awakening in one's heart of an intense desire for revenge. Such desire is often aroused in the most well-constituted temperaments among us, and in this case it might be said that the sound physical nerves of the daughter of the Romers craved the satisfaction of such an impulse with the same stolid persistence as her flesh and blood craved for air and sun. But how to achieve it? What new and elaborate humiliation to devise for this irritating partner of her days?

The bathing episode was beginning to lose its piquancy. Custom, with its kindly obliviousness, had already considerably modified Lacrima's fears, and there had ceased to be for Gladys any further pleasure in displaying her aquarian agility before a companion so occupied with the beauty of lawn and garden at that magical hour.

Fate, however, partial, as it often is, to such patient tenacity of emotion, let fall at last, at her very feet, the opportunity she craved.

She had just begun to experience that miserable sensation, so sickeningly oppressive to a happy disposition, of hating where she could not hurt, when, one evening, news was brought to the house by Mark Purvis the game-keeper that a wandering flock of wild-geese had taken up its temporary abode amid the reeds of Auber Lake. Mr. Romer himself soon brought confirmation of this fact.

The birds appeared to leave the place during the day and fly far westward, possibly as far as the

marshes of Sedgemoor, but they always returned at night-fall to this new tarrying ground.

The very evening of this exciting discovery, Gladys' active mind formulated a thrilling and absorbing project, which she positively trembled with longing to communicate to Lacrima. She found the long dinner that night, and the subsequent chatter with Dangelis on the terrace, almost too tedious to be endured; and it was at an unusually early hour that she surprised her cousin by joining her in her room.

The Pariah was seated at her mirror, wearily reducing to order her entangled curls, when Gladys entered. She looked very fragile in her white bodice and the little uplifted arms, that the mirror reflected, showed unnaturally long and thin. When one hates a person with the sort of massive hatred such as, at that time, beat sullenly under Gladys' rounded bosom, every little physical characteristic in the object of our emotion is an added incentive to our revengeful purpose.

This Saturnian planetary law is unfortunately not confined to antipathies between persons of the same sex. Sometimes the most unhappy results have been known to spring from the manner in which one or another, even of two lovers, has lifted chin or head, or moved characteristically across a room.

Thus it were almost impossible to exaggerate the loathing with which this high-spirited girl contemplated the pale oval face and slender swaying arms of her friend, as full of her new project she flung herself into her favourite arm chair and met Lacrima's frightened eyes in the gilded Georgian

mirror. She began her attack with elaborate feline obliquity.

"They say Mark Purvis' crazy daughter has been giving trouble again. He was up this morning, talking to father about it."

"Why don't you send her away?" said the Italian, without turning round.

"Send her away? She has to do all the house-work down there! Mark has no one else, you know, and the poor man does not want the expense of hiring a woman."

"Isn't it rather a lonely place for a child like that?"

"Lonely? I should think it is lonely! But what would you have? Somebody must keep that cottage clean; and its just as well a wretched mad girl, of no use to anyone, should do it, as that a sound person should lose her wits in such a god-forsaken spot!"

"What does she do at — at these times? Is she violent?"

"Oh, she gets out in the night and roams about the woods. She was once found up to her knees in the water. No, she isn't exactly violent. But she is a great nuisance."

"It must be terrible for her father!"

"Well — in a way it does bother him. But he is not the man to stand much nonsense."

"I hope he is kind to her."

Gladys laughed. "What a soft-hearted darling you are! I expect he finds sometimes that you can't manage mad people, any more than you can manage children, without using the stick. But I fancy, on the whole, he doesn't treat her badly. He's a fairly good-natured man."

The Pariah sighed. "I think Mr. Romer ought to send her away at once to some kind of home, and pay someone to take her place."

"I daresay you do! If you had your way, father wouldn't have a penny left in the bank."

The Pariah rose from her seat, crossed over to the window, and looked out into the sultry night. What a world this was! All the gentle and troubled beings in it seemed over-ridden by gigantic merciless wheels!

A little awed, in spite of herself, by the solemnity of her companion, Gladys sought to bring her back out of this translunar mood by capricious playfulness. She stretched herself out at full length in her low chair, and calling the girl to her side, began caressing her, pulling her down at last upon her lap.

"Guess what has happened!" she murmured softly, as the quick beating of the Pariah's heart communicated itself to her, and made her own still harder.

"Oh, I know its something I shan't like, something that I shall dread!" cried the younger girl, making a feeble effort to escape.

"Shall I tell you what it is?" Gladys went on, easily overcoming this slight movement. "You know, don't you, that there's a flock of wild-geese settled on the island in the middle of Auber Lake? Well! I have got a lovely plan. I've never yet seen those birds, because they don't come back till the evening. What you and I are going to do, darling, is to slip away out of the house, next time Mr. Dangelis goes to see that friend of yours, and make straight to Auber Lake! I've never been into those woods by

night, and it'll be extraordinarily thrilling to see what Auber Lake looks like with the moon gleaming on it. And then we may be able to make the wild-geese rise, by throwing sticks or something, into the water. Oh, it'll be simply lovely! Don't you think so, darling? Aren't you quite thrilled by the idea?"

The Pariah liberated herself by a sudden effort and stood erect on the floor.

"I think you are the wickedest girl that God ever made!" she said solemnly. And then, as the full implication of the proposed adventure grew upon her, she clasped her hands convulsively. "You cannot mean it!" she cried. "You cannot mean it! You are teasing me, Gladys. You are only saying it to tease me."

"Why, you're not such a coward as all that!" her cousin replied. "Think what it must be for Nance Purvis, who always lives down there! I shouldn't like to be more cowardly than a poor crazy labouring girl. We really *ought* to visit the place, once in a way, to see if these stories are true about her escaping out of the house. One can never tell from what Mark says. He may have been drinking and imagining it all."

Lacrima turned away and began rapidly undressing. Without a word she arranged the books on her table, moving about like a person in a trance, and without a word she slipped into bed and turned her face to the wall.

Gladys smiled, stretched herself luxuriously, and continued speaking.

"Auber Lake by moon-light would well be worth a night walk. You know it's supposed to be the

most romantic spot in Somersetshire? They say it's incredibly old. Some people think it was used in prehistoric times by the druids as a place of worship. The villagers never dare to go near it after dark. They say that very curious noises are heard there. But of course that may only be the mad —"

She was not allowed to go on. The silent figure in the bed suddenly sat straight up, with wide-staring eyes fixed upon her, and said slowly and solemnly, "If I come with you to this place, will you faithfully promise me that your father will send that girl into a home?"

Gladys was so surprised by this unexpected utterance that she made an inarticulate gasping noise in her throat.

"Yes," she answered, mesmerized by the Pariah's fixed glance. "Yes — most certainly. If you come with me to see those wild-geese, I'll make any promise you like about that girl!"

Lacrima continued for a moment fixing her with wide-dilated pupils.

Then, with a shiver that passed from head to foot, she slowly sank back on her pillows and closed her eyes.

Gladys rose a little uneasily from her chair. "But of course," she said, "you understand she may not *want* to go away. She is quite crazy, you know. And she may prefer wandering about freely among dark woods to being locked up in a nice white-washed asylum, under the care of fat motherly nurses!"

With this parting shot she went off into her own room feeling in a curious vague manner that somehow or another the edge of her delectation had been

taken off. In this unexpected resolution of the Italian, the Mythology of Sacrifice had suddenly struck a staggering blow at the Mythology of Power. Like the point of a bright silver sword, this unforseen vein of heroism in the Pariah cleared the sultry air of that hot night with a magical freshness and coolness. A planetary onlooker might have been conscious at that moment of strange spiritual vibrations passing to and fro over the sleeping roofs of Nevilton. But perhaps such a one would also have been conscious of the abysmal indifference to either stream of opposing influence, of the high, cold galaxy of the Milky Way, stretched contemptuously above them all!

All we are able to be certain of is, that as the fair-haired daughter of the house prepared for bed she muttered sullenly to herself. "I'll make her go anyway. It will be lovely to feel her shiver, when we pass under those thick laurels! That mad girl won't leave the place, unless they drag her by force."

Left alone, Lacrima remained, for nearly two hours, motionless and with closed eyes. She was not asleep, however. Strange and desperate thoughts pursued one another through her brain. She wondered if she, too, like the girl of Auber Lake, were destined to find relief from this merciless world in the unhinging of her reason. She reverted again and again in her mind to her cousin's final malicious suggestion. That would be indeed, she thought, a bitter example of life's irony, if after going through all this to save the poor wretch, such sacrifice only meant worse misery for her. But no! God could not be as unkind as that.

She stretched out her arm for a book with which to still the troublesome palpitation of her heart.

The book she seized by chance turned out to be Andersen's Fairy Stories, and she read herself to sleep with the tale of the little princess who wove coats of nettles for her enchanted brothers, and all night long she dreamed of mad unhappy girls struggling amid entwining branches, of bottomless lakes full of terrible drowned faces, and of flocks of wild-geese that were all of them kings' sons!

The Saturday following this eventful colloquy between the cousins was a day of concentrated gloom. There was thunder in the vicinity and, although no rain had actually fallen in Nevilton, there was a brooding presence of it in the heavy atmosphere.

The night seemed to descend that evening more quickly than usual. By eight o'clock a strange unnatural twilight spread itself over the landscape. The trees in the park submitted forlornly to a burden of sultry indistinction and seemed, in their pregnant stillness, to be trying in vain to make mysterious signals to one another.

Dinner in the gracious Elizabethan dining-room was an oppressive and discomfortable meal to all concerned. Mrs. Romer was full of tremours and apprehensions over the idea of a possible thunderstorm.

The quarry-owner was silent and preoccupied, his mind reviewing all the complicated issues of a new financial scheme. Dangelis kept looking at his watch. He had promised to be at Dead Man's Lane by nine o'clock, and the meal seemed to drag itself out longer than he had anticipated.

He was a little apprehensive, too, as to what reception he would receive when he did arrive at Mr. Quincunx's threshold.

Their last encounter had been so extremely controversial, that he feared lest the sensitive recluse might be harbouring one of his obstinate psychic reactions at his expense.

He was very unwilling to risk the loss of Mr. Quincunx's society. There was no one in Nevilton to whom he could discourse quite as freely and philosophically as he could to the conscripted office-clerk, and his American interest in a "representative type" found inexhaustible satisfaction in listening to the cynical murmurings of this eccentric being.

Lacrima was calm and self-contained, but she ate hardly anything; and the hand with which she raised her glass to her lips trembled in spite of all her efforts.

Gladys herself was exuberant with suppressed excitement. Every now and then she glanced furtively at the window, and at other times, when there was no reason for such an outburst, she gave vent to a low feline laugh. She was of the type of animal that the approach of thunder, and the presence of electricity in the air, fills with magnetic nervous exaltation.

The meal was over at last, and the various persons of the group hastened to separate, each of them weighed upon, as if by an atmospheric hand, with the burden of their own purposes and apprehensions.

The two girls retired to their rooms. Mrs. Romer retreated to her favourite corner in the entrance hall, and then, uneasy even here, took refuge in the assuaging society of her friend the housekeeper.

Romer himself marched away gloomily to his study; and Dangelis, snatching up his coat and hat, made off across the south garden.

It did not take the American long to reach the low hedge which separated Mr. Quincunx's garden from the lane. The recluse was awaiting him, and joined him at once at the gate, giving him no invitation to enter, and taking for granted that their conversation was to be a pedestrian one.

Mr. Quincunx experienced a curious reluctance to allow any of his friends to cross his threshold. The only one completely privileged in this matter was young Luke Andersen, whose gay urbanity was so insidious that it would have overcome the resistance of a Trappist monk.

"Well, where are you proposing to take me tonight?" enquired Dangelis, when they had advanced in silence some distance up the hill.

"To a place that will interest you, if your damned artistic tastes haven't quite spoiled your pleasure in little things!"

"Not to the Seven Ashes again?" protested the American. "I know this lane leads up there."

"You wait a little. We shall turn off presently," muttered his companion. "The truth is I am taking you on a sort of scouting expedition tonight."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well — if you must know, you shall know! I saw Miss Traffio yesterday and she asked me to keep an eye on Auber Lake tonight."

"What? That place they were talking of? Where the wild-geese are?"

Mr. Quincunx nodded. "It may, for all I know,

be a wild-goose chase. But I find your friend Gladys is up to her little tricks again — frightening people and upsetting their minds. And I promised Lacrima that you and I would stroll round that way — just to see that the girls don't come to any harm. Only we mustn't let them know we're there. Lacrima would never forgive me if Gladys saw us."

"Do you mean to say that those two children are going to wander about these confounded damp woods of yours alone?" cried the American.

"Look here, Mr. Dangelis, please understand this quite clearly. If you ever say a word to your precious Miss Gladys about this little scouting expedition, that's an end of our talks, forever and a day!"

The citizen of Ohio bowed with a mock heroic gesture, removing his hat as he did so.

"I submit to your conditions, Don Quixote. I am entirely at your service. Is it the idea that we should track our friends on hands and knees? I am quite ready even for that, but I know what these woods of yours are like."

Mr. Quincunx vouchsafed no reply to this ill-timed jocosity. He was anxiously surveying the tall hedge upon their right hand. "Here's the way," he suddenly exclaimed. "Here's the path. We can hit a short-cut here that brings us straight through Camel's Cover, up to Wild Pine. Then we can slip down into Badger's Bottom and so into the Auber Woods."

"But I thought the Auber Woods were much nearer than that. You told me the other day that you could get into the heart of them, in a quarter of an hour from your own garden!"

"And so I can, my friend," replied Mr. Quincunx, scrambling up the bank into the field, and turning to offer his hand to his companion. "But it happens that this is the way those girls are coming. At any rate that is what she said. They were going to avoid my lane but they were going to enter the woods from the Seven Ashes side, just because it is so much nearer."

"I submit, I submit," muttered the artist blandly. "I only hope this scouting business needn't commence till we have got well through Camel's Cover and Badger's Bottom! I must confess I am not altogether in love with the sound of those places, though no doubt they are harmless enough. But you people do certainly select the most extraordinary names for your localities. Our own little lapses in these things are classical compared with your Badgers and Camels and Ashes and Dead Men!"

Mr. Quincunx did not condescend to reply to this. He continued to plough his way across the field, every now and then glancing nervously at the sky, which grew more and more threatening. Walking behind him and a little on one side, the American was singularly impressed by the appearance he presented, especially when the faint light of the pallid and cloud-flecked moon fell on his uplifted profile. With his corrugated brow and his pointed beard, Mr. Quincunx was a noticeable figure at any time, but under the present atmospheric conditions his lean form and striking head made a picture of forlorn desolation worthy of the sombre genius of a Bewick.

Dangelis conceived the idea of a picture, which

he himself might be capable of evoking, with this melancholy, solitary figure as its protagonist.

He wondered vaguely what background he would select as worthy of the resolute hopelessness in Mr. Quincunx's forlorn mien.

It was only after they had traversed the sloping recesses of Camel's Cover, and had arrived at the crest of the Wild Pine ridge, that he was able to answer this question. Then he knew at once. The true pictorial background for his eccentric companion could be nothing less than that line of wind-shaken, rain-washed Scotch firs, which, visible from all portions of Nevilton, had gathered to themselves the very essence of its historic tragedy.

These trees, like Mr. Quincunx, seemed to derive a grim satisfaction from their submission to destiny. Like him, they submitted with a definite volition of resolution. They took, as he took, the line of least resistance with a sort of stark voluptuousness. They did not simply bow to the winds and rains that oppressed them. They positively welcomed them. And yet all the while, just as he did, they emitted a low melancholy murmur of protest, a murmur as completely different from the howling eloquence of the ashes and elms, as it was different from the low querulous sob of the larches and elders. The rusty-red stain, too, in the rough bark of their trunks, was also singularly congruous with a certain reddish tinge, which often darkened the countenance of the recluse, especially when his fits of goblin-humour shook him into convulsive merriment.

As they paused for a moment on this melancholy ridge, looking back at the flickering lights of the vil-

lage, and down into the darkness in front of them, the painter made a mental vow that before he left Nevilton he would sublimate his vision of Mr. Quincunx into a genuine masterpiece. Plunging once more into the shadows, they followed a dark lane which finally emerged into a wide-sloping valley. In the depths of this was the secluded hollow, full of long grass and tufted reeds, which was the place known as Badger's Bottom.

The entrance to Auber Wood was now at hand; and as they reached its sinister outskirts, they both instinctively paused to take stock of their surroundings. The night was more sultry than ever. The leaves and grasses swayed with an almost imperceptible movement, as if stirred, not by the wind, but by the actual heavy breathing of the Earth herself, troubled and agitated in her planetary sleep.

Sombre banks of clouds moved intermittently over the face of a blurred moon, and, out of the soil at their feet, rose up damp exotic odours, giving the whole valley the atmosphere of an enormous hothouse.

It was one of those hushed, steamy nights, pregnant and listening, which the peculiar conditions of our English climate do not often produce, and which are for that very reason often quite startling in their emotional appeal. The path which the two men took, after once they had entered the wood, was one that led them through a gloomy tunnel of gigantic, overhanging laurel-bushes.

All the chief entrances to Auber Wood were edged with these exotics. Some capricious eighteenth-century Seldom, — perhaps the one who raised the

Tower of Pleasure on the site of the resting-place of the Holy Rood—had planted them there, and for more than a hundred years they had grown and multiplied.

Auber Lake itself was the centre of a circumference of thick jungle-like brushwood which itself was overshadowed by high sloping hills. These hills, also heavily wooded, formed a sort of gigantic cup or basin, and the level expanse of undergrowth they enclosed was itself the margin of a yet deeper concavity, in the middle of which was the lake-bed.

Mingling curiously with the more indigenous trees in this place were several unusual and alien importations. Some of these, like the huge laurels they were now passing under, belonged more properly to gardens than to woods. Others were of a still stranger and more foreign nature, and produced a very bizarre effect where they grew, as though one had suddenly come upon the circle of some heathen grove, in the midst of an English forest. Auber Lake was certainly a spot of an unusual character. Once it had been drained, and a large monolith, of the same stone as that produced by Leo's Hill, had been discovered embedded in the mud. Traces were said to have been discerned upon this of ancient human carving, but local antiquarianism had contradicted this rumour. At least it may be said that nowhere else on the Romer estate, except perhaps in Nevilton churchyard, was the tawny-colored clay which bore so close a symbolic, if not a geological, relation to the famous yellow sandstone, more heavily and malignantly clinging, in its oozy consistence.

Dangelis and Mr. Quincunx advanced slowly, and in profound silence, along their overshadowed path.

An occasional wood-pigeon, disturbed in its roosting, flapped awkwardly through the branches; and far away, in another part of the wood, sounded at intervals the melancholy cry of a screech-owl.

Great leather-winged bats flitted over their heads with queer unearthly little cries; and every now and then some agitated moth, from the under-bushes, fluttered heavily across their faces. Sometimes in the darkness their feet stumbled upon a dead branch, but more often they slipped uneasily in the deep ruts left in the mud by the woodmen's carts.

All the various intermittent noises they heard only threw the palpable stillness of the place into heavier relief.

The artist from the wind-swept plains of Ohio felt as though he had never plunged so deeply into the indrawn recesses of the earth-powers as he was doing now. It seemed to him as though they were approaching the guarded precincts of some dark and crouching idol. It was as if, by some ill-omened mistake, they had stumbled unawares upon a spot that through interminable ages had been forbidden to human tread.

And yet the place seemed to expect them, to await them; to have in reserve for them some laboured pregnancy of woeful significance.

Once more, as he walked behind Mr. Quincunx, Dangelis was startled by the extraordinary congruity of that forlorn figure with the occasion and the scene. The form of the recluse seemed to exhale a reciprocity of fearful brooding. Auber Wood seemed aware of him, and ready to welcome him, in con-

sentaneous sympathy. He might have been the long-expected priest of some immemorial rites transacted there, the priest of some old heathen worship, perhaps the worship of generations of dead people, buried under those damp leaves.

It seemed a long while to Ralph Dangelis, in spite of the breathless quickening of his imagination, before the laurel-tunnel thinned away, and the two men were able to walk side by side between the trunks of the larger trees. Here again they encountered Scotch firs.

What strange dream, of what fantastic possessor of this solitude, had shaped itself into the planting of these moorland giants, among the native-born oaks and beeches of this weird place?

The open spaces at the foot of the tree-trunks were filled with an obscure mass of oozy stalks and heavily drooping leaves. The obscurity of the spot made it difficult to discern the differences between these rank growths; but the ghostly flowers of enormous hemlocks stood forth from among the rest. Fungoid excrescences, of some sort or another, were certainly prolific here. Their charnel-house odour set Dangelis thinking of a morgue he had once visited.

At last — and with quite startling suddenness — the path they followed emerged into a wide open expanse; and there, — under the diffused light of the cloud-darkened moon — they saw stretched at their feet the dim surface of Auber Lake.

Mr. Quincunx stood for a moment motionless and silent, leaning upon his stick. Then he turned to his companion; and the American noticed how vague

and shadowy his face looked, as if it were a face seen through some more opaque medium than that of air.

They sat down together upon a fallen log; and out of an instinctive desire to break the tension of the spell that lay on him Dangelis lit a cigarette.

He had smoked in silence for some moments, when Mr. Quincunx, who had been listening attentively, raised his hand. "Hark!" he said, "do you hear anything?"

Across the stillness of the water came a low blood-curdling wail. It was hardly a human sound, and yet it was not like the voice of any bird or beast. It seemed to unsettle the drowsy natives of the spot; for a harsh twittering of sedge-birds answered it, and a great water-rat splashed down into the lake.

"God! they were right then," whispered the American. "They spoke of some mad girl living down here, but I did not believe them. It seemed incredible that such a thing should be allowed. Quick, my friend! — we ought to warn those girls at once and get them away. This is not the sort of thing for them to hear."

They both rose and listened intently, but the sound was not repeated; only a hot gust of wind coming, as it were, out of the lake itself, went quivering through the reeds.

"I don't imagine," said Mr. Quincunx calmly, "that *your* young lady will be much alarmed. I fancy she has less fear of this kind of thing than that water-rat we heard just now. It'll terrify Lacrima, though. But I understand that your charming sweet-

heart gets a good deal of amusement from causing people to feel terror!"

Dangelis was so accustomed to the plain-spoken utterances of the hermit of Dead Man's Lane that he received this indictment of his enchantress with complete equanimity.

"All the same," he remarked, "I think we'd better go and meet them, if you know the direction they're coming. It's not a very pleasant proposition, any way, to face escaped lunatics in a place like this."

"I tell you," mutterd Mr. Quincunx crossly, "your darling Gladys is coming here for no other reason than to hear that girl's cries. The more they terrify Lacrima, the better she'll be pleased."

"I don't know about Lacrima," answered Dangelis. "I know that devil of a noise will scare *me* if I hear it again."

Mr. Quincunx did not reply. With his hand on his companion's arm he was once more listening intently. At the back of his mind was gradually forming a grim remote wish that some overt act and palpable revelation of Gladys Romer's interesting character might effect a change of heart in the citizen of Ohio.

Such a wish had been obscurely present in his brain ever since they started on this expedition; and now that the situation was developing, it took a more vivid shape.

"I believe," he remarked at last, "I hear them coming down the path. Listen! It's on the other side of the pond, — over there." He pointed across the water to the left-hand corner of the lake. It was from the right-hand corner, where the keeper's

cottage stood, that the poor mad girl's voice had proceeded.

"Yes; I am sure!" he whispered after a moment's pause. "Come! quick! get in here; then they won't see us even if they walk round this way."

He pulled Dangelis beneath the over-hanging boughs of a large weeping willow. The droop of this tree's delicate foliage made, in the semi-darkness in which they were, a complete and impenetrable hiding-place; and yet from between the trailing branches, when they held them apart with their hands, they had a free and unimpeded view of the whole surface of the lake.

The sound of distant voices struck clearly now upon their ears; and a moment after, nudging his companion, Mr. Quincunx pointed to two cloaked figures advancing across the open space towards the water's edge.

"Hush!" whispered the recluse. "They are bound to come this way now."

The two girls were, however, for the moment, apparently occupied with another intention. The taller of the two stopped and picked up something from the ground, and then approaching close to the lake's edge raised her arm and flung it far into the water.

The object she threw must have been a stick or a stone of considerable size, for the splash it produced was startling.

The result was also startling. From a little island in the middle of the lake, rose suddenly, with a tremendous flapping, several large and broad-winged birds. They flew in heavy circles, at first, over the island; and then, descending to the water's level,

went splashing and flapping across its surface, uttering strange cries.

The noise made by these birds had hardly subsided, as they settled down in a thick bed of reeds, when, once more, that terrible inhuman wail rang out upon the night. Both men peered forth anxiously from their hiding-place, to see the effect of this sound upon their two friends.

They could see that they both stood stone-still for a moment as if petrified by terror.

Then they noticed that the taller of the two drew her companion still nearer to the water's edge.

"If that yell begins again," whispered the American, "I shall go out and speak to them."

Mr. Quincunx made no answer. He prayed in his heart that something would occur to initiate this innocent Westerner a little more closely into the workings of his inamorata's mind. It seemed indeed quite within the bounds of possibility that the recluse might be gratified in this wish, for the girls began rapidly advancing towards them, skirting the edge of the lake.

The two men watched their approach in silence, the artist savouring with a deep imaginative excitement the mystical glamour of the scene.

He felt it would be indelibly and forever imprinted on his mind, this hot heavily scented night, this pallid-glimmering lake, those uneasy stirrings of the wild-geese in their obscure reed-bed, and the frightful hush of the listening woods, as they seemed to await a repetition of that unearthly cry.

The girls had actually paused at the verge of the lake, just in front of their hiding-place; so near, in

fact, that by stretching out his arm, from behind his willowy screen, Dangelis could have touched Gladys on the shoulder, when the fearfully expected voice broke forth again upon the night.

The men could see the visible tremor of panic-fear quiver through Lacrima's slight frame.

"Oh, let us go! — let us go!" she pleaded, pulling with feverish fingers at her companion's cloak.

But Gladys folded her arms and flung back her head.

"Little coward!" she murmured in a low unshaken voice. "I am not afraid of a mad girl's yelling. Look! there's one of those birds going back to the island!"

Once more the inhuman wail trembled across the water.

"Gladys! Gladys dear!" cried the panic-stricken girl, "I cannot endure it! I shall go mad myself if we do not go! I'll do anything you ask me! I'll go anywhere with you! Only — please — let us go away now!"

The sound was repeated again, and this time it proceeded from a quarter much nearer them. All four listeners held their breath. Presently the Italian made a terrified gesture and pointed frantically to the right bank of the lake.

"I see her!" she cried, "I see her! She is coming towards us!"

The frightened girl made a movement as if she would break away from her companion and flee into the darkness of the trees.

Gladys clasped her firmly in her arms.

"No — no!" she said, "no running off! Remember

our agreement! There's nothing really to be afraid of. I'm not afraid."

A slight quiver in her voice a little belied the calmness of this statement. She was indeed torn at that moment between a very natural desire to escape herself and an insatiable craving to prolong her companion's agitation.

In her convulsive terror the Italian, unable to free herself from the elder girl's enfolding arms, buried her head in the other's cloak.

Thus linked, the two might have posed for a picture of heroic sisterly solicitude, in the presence of extreme danger.

Once more that ghastly cry resounded through the silence; and several nocturnal birds, from distant portions of the wood, replied to it with their melancholy hootings.

The white-garbed figure of the mad girl, her arms tossed tragically above her head, came swaying towards them. She moved unevenly, and staggered in her advance, as if her volition had not complete power over her movements. Gladys was evidently considerably alarmed herself now. She clutched at a chance of combining escape with triumph.

"Say you let me off that promise!" she whispered hoarsely, "and we'll run together! We're quite close to the way out."

Who can read the obscure recesses of the human mind, or gauge the supernatural strength that lurks amid the frailest nerves?

This reference to her sublime contract was the one thing needed to rouse the abandoned soul of the Pariah. For one brief second more the powers of

darkness struggled over her bowed head with the powers of light.

Then with a desperate movement the Italian rose erect, flung aside her cousin's arms, turned boldly towards the approaching maniac, and ran straight to meet her. Her unexpected appearance produced an immediate effect upon the unhappy girl. Her wildly-tossing arms fell to her side. Her wailing died away in pathetic sobs, and these also quickly ceased.

Lacrima seemed to act like one possessed of some invincible magic. One might have dreamed that now for the first time for uncounted ages this unholy shrine of heathen tradition was invaded by an emissary of the true Faith.

Gladys, who had reeled bewildered against the woodwork of an ancient weir, that formed the outlet to the lake, leaned in complete prostration of astonishment upon this support, and gazed helplessly and dumbly at the two figures. She was too petrified with amazement to notice the appearance of Ralph and Maurice, who, also absorbed in watching this strange encounter, had half-emerged from their concealment.

The three onlookers saw the Italian lay her hands upon the girl's forehead, smooth back her hair, kiss her gently on the brow, and fling her own cloak over her bare shoulders. They heard her murmuring again and again some soft repetition of soothing words. Dangelis caught the liquid syllables of the Tuscan tongue. Evidently in her excitement the child of Genoa the Superb had reverted to the language of her fathers.

The next thing they saw was the slow retreat of the two together, towards the keeper's cottage; the arm of the Italian clinging tenderly round the maniac's waist.

At this point Dangelis stepped forward and made himself known to Gladys.

The expression on the face of Mr. Romer's daughter, when she recognized the American, was a palimpsest of conflicting emotions. Her surprise was still more intense when Mr. Quincunx stepped out from the shadow of the drooping tree and raised his hat to her. Her eyes for the moment looked positively scared; and her mouth opened, like the mouth of a bewildered infant. The tone with which the citizen of Ohio addressed the confused young lady made the heart of Mr. Quincunx leap for joy.

"I am astonished at you," he said. "I should not have believed such a thing possible! Your only excuse is that this infernal jest of yours has turned out so well for the people concerned, and so shamefully for yourself. How could you treat that brave foreign child so brutally? Why — I saw her trembling and trembling, and trying to get away; and you were holding — actually holding her — while that poor mad thing came nearer! It's a good thing for you that the Catholic spirit in her burst out at last. Do you know what spell she used to bring that girl to her senses? A spell that you will never understand, my friend, for all this baptism and confirmation business! Why — she quoted passages out of the Litany of Our Lady! I heard her clearly, and I recognized the words. I am a damned atheist myself, but if ever I felt religion to be justified it was when

your cousin stopped that girl's crying. It was like real magic. You ought to be thoroughly proud of her! I shall tell her when I see her what I feel about her."

Gladys rose from her seat on the weir and faced them haughtily. Her surprise once over, and the rebuke having fallen, she became mistress of herself again.

"I suppose," she said, completely ignoring Mr. Quincunx, "we'd better follow those two, and see if Lacrima gets her safely into the house. I fancy she'll have no difficulty about it. Of course if she had not done this I should have had to do it myself. But not knowing Italian" — she added this with a sneer — "I am not so suitable a mad-house nurse."

"It was her good heart, Gladys," responded the American; "not her Italian, nor her Litany, that soothed that girl's mind. I wish your heart, my friend, were half as good."

"Well," returned the fair girl quite cheerfully, "we'll leave my heart for the present, and see how Lacrima has got on."

She took the arm which Dangelis had not offered, but which his chivalry forbade him to refuse, and together they proceeded to follow the heroic Genoese.

Mr. Quincunx shuffled unregarded behind them.

They had hardly reached the keeper's cottage, a desolate and ancient erection, of the usual stone material, darkened with damp and overshadowed by a moss-grown oak, when Lacrima herself came towards them.

She started with surprise at seeing, in the shadowy obscurity, the figures of the two men.

Her surprise changed to pleasure when she recognized their identity.

"Ah!" she said. "You come too late. Gladys and I have had quite an adventure, haven't we, cousin?"

Mr. Quincunx glanced at the American to see if he embraced the full generosity of the turn she gave to the situation.

Gladys took advantage of it in a moment. "You see I was right after all," she remarked. "I knew you would lose your alarm directly you saw that girl! When it came to the point you were braver than I. You dear thing!" She kissed the Italian ostentatiously, and then retook possession of her admirer's arm.

"I got her up to her room without waking her father," said Lacrima. "She had left the door wide open. Gladys is going to ask Mr. Romer to have her sent away to some sort of home. I believe they'll be able to cure her. She talked quite sensibly to me. I am sure she only wants to be treated gently. I'm afraid her father's unkind to her. You are going to arrange for her being sent away, aren't you, Gladys?"

The elder girl turned. "Of course, my dear, of course. I don't go back on my word."

The four friends proceeded to take the nearest path through the wood. One by one the frightened wild-geese returned to their roosting-place on the island. The water-rats resumed uninterrupted their night-prowls along the reedy edge of the lake, and the wood-pigeons settled down in peace upon their high branches.

Long before Dead Man's Lane was reached the two couples had drifted conveniently apart in their lingering return.

Mr. Quincunx had seldom been more tender towards his little friend than he was that night; and Lacrima, still strangely happy in the after-ebb of her supernatural exultation, nestled closely to his side as they drifted leisurely across the fields.

In what precise manner the deeply-betrayed Gladys regained the confidence of her lover need not be related. The artist from Ohio would have been adamantine indeed, could he have resisted the appeal which the amorous telepathy of this magnetic young person gave her the power of expressing.

Meanwhile, in her low-pitched room, with the shadow of the oak-tree coming and going across her face, as the moonlight shone out or faded, Nance Purvis lay placidly asleep, dreaming no more of strange phantoms or of stinging whips, but of gentle spirits from some translunar region, who caressed her forehead with hands softer than moth's wings and spoke to her in a tongue that was like the moonlight itself made audible.

CHAPTER XIII

LACRIMA

MR. JOHN GORING was feeding his rabbits. In the gross texture of his clayish nature there were one or two curious layers of a pleasanter material. One of these, for instance, was now shown in the friendly equanimity with which he permitted a round-headed awkward youth, more than half idiotic, to assist him at this innocent task.

Between Mr. Goring and Bert Leerd there existed one of those inexplicable friendships, which so often, to the bewilderment of moral philosophers, bring a twilight of humanity into the most sinister mental caves. The farmer had saved this youth from a conspiracy of Poor-Law officials who were on the point of consigning him to an asylum. He had assumed responsibility for his good-behaviour and had given him a lodging — his parents being both dead — in the Priory itself.

Not a few young servant-girls, selected by Mr. Goring rather for their appearance than their disposition, had been dismissed from his service, after violent and wrathful scenes, for being caught teasing this unfortunate; and even the cook, a female of the most taciturn and sombre temper, was compelled to treat him with comparative consideration. The gossips of Nevilton swore, as one may believe, that the farmer, in being kind to this boy, was only obeying

the mandate of nature; but no one who had ever beheld Bert's mother, gave the least credence to such a story.

Another of Mr. Goring's softer aspects was his mania for tame rabbits. These he kept in commodious and spacious hutches at the back of his house, and every year wonderful and interesting additions were added to their number.

On this particular morning both the farmer and his idiot were absorbed and rapt in contemplation before the gambols of two large new pets — great silky lop-eared things — who had arrived the night before. Mr. Goring was feeding them with fresh lettuces, carefully handed to him by his assistant, who divested these plants of their rough outer leaves and dried them on the palms of his hands.

"The little 'un do lap 'em up fastest, master," remarked the boy. "I mind how those others, with them girt ears, did love a fresh lettuce."

Mr. Goring watched with mute satisfaction the quivering nostrils and nibbling mouth of the dainty voracious creature.

"Mustn't let them have more than three at a time, Bert," he remarked. "But they do love them, as you say."

"What be going to call this little 'un, master?" asked the boy.

Mr. Goring straightened his back and drew a deep breath.

"What do you think, Bert, my boy?" he cried, in a husky excited tone, prodding his assistant jocosely with the handle of his riding-whip; "what do you think? What would you call her?"

"Ah! I knew she were a she, master!" chuckled the idiot. "I knew that, afore she were out of the packer-case! Call 'er?" and the boy leered an indescribable leer. "By gum! I can tell 'ee that fast enough. Call 'er Missy Lacrima, pretty little Missy Lacrima, wot lives up at the House, and wot is going to be missus 'ere afore long."

Mr. Goring surveyed his protégé for a moment with sublime contentment, and then humorously flicked at his ears with his whip.

"Right! my imp of Satan. Right! my spawn of Belial. That is just what I *was* thinking."

"She be silky and soft to handle," went on the idiot, "and her, up at the House, be no contrary, or I'm darned mistaken."

Mr. Goring expressed his satisfaction at his friend's intelligence by giving him a push that nearly threw him backwards.

"And I'll tell you this, my boy," he remarked confidentially, surveying the long line of well-filled hutches, "we've never yet bought such a rabbit, as this foreign one will turn out, or you and I be damned fools."

"The young lady'll get mighty fond of these 'ere long-ears, looks so to me," observed the youth. "Hope she won't be a feeding 'em with wet cabbage, same as maids most often do."

The farmer grew even more confidential, drawing close to his assistant and addressing him in the tone customary with him on market-days, when feeling the ribs of fatted cattle.

"That same young lady is coming up here this morning, Bert," he remarked significantly. "The squire's giving her a note to bring along."

"And you be going to bring matters to a head, master," rejoined the boy. "That's wise and thoughtful of 'ee, choosing time, like, and season, as the Book says. Maids be wonderful sly when the sun's down, while of mornings they be meek as guinea-fowls."

The appearance of the Priory servant — no very demure figure — put a sudden stop to these touching confidences.

"Miss Lacrima, with a note, in the front parlour!" the damsel shouted.

"You needn't call so loud, girl," grumbled the farmer. "And how often must I tell you to say 'Miss Traffio,' not 'Miss Lacrima'?"

The girl tossed her head and pouted her lips.

"A person isn't used to waiting on foreigners," she muttered.

Mr. Goring's only reply to this remark was to pinch her arm unmercifully. He then pushed her aside, and entering the kitchen, walked rapidly through to the front of the house. The front parlour in the Priory was nothing more nor less than the old entrance-gate of the Cistercian Monastery, preserved through four centuries, with hardly a change.

The roof was high and vaulted. In the centre of the vault a great many-petalled rose, carved in Leonian stone, seemed to gather all the curves and lines of the masonry together, and hold them in religious concentration.

The fire-place — a thing of more recent, but still sufficiently ancient date — displayed the delicate and gracious fantasy of some local Jacobean artist, who had lavished upon its ornate mouldings a more personal feeling than one is usually aware of in these

things. In place of a fire the wide grate was, at this moment, full of new-grown bracken fronds, evidently recently picked, for they were still fresh and green.

In front of the fire-place stood Lacrima with the letter in her hand. Had Mr. Goring been a little less persuaded of the "meekness" of this young person, he would have recognized something not altogether friendly to himself and his plans in the strained white face she raised to him and the stiff gloved hand she extended.

He begged her to be seated. She waved aside the chair he offered, and handed him the letter. He tore this open and glanced carelessly at its contents.

The letter was indeed brief enough, containing nothing but the following gnomic words: "Refusal or no refusal," signed with an imperial flourish.

He flung it down on the table, and came to business at once.

"You mustn't let that little mistake of Auber Great Meadow mean anything, missie," he said. "You were too hasty with a fellow that time — too hasty and coy-like. Those be queer maids' tricks, that crying and running! But, bless my heart! I don't bear you any grudge for it. You needn't think it."

He advanced a step — while she retreated, very pale and very calm, her little fingers clasped nervously together. She managed to keep the table between them, so that, barring a grotesque and obvious pursuit of her, she was well out of his reach.

"I have a plain and simple offer to make to you, my dear," he continued, "and it is one that can do you no hurt or shame. I am not one of those who

waste words in courting a girl, least of all a young lady of education like yourself. The fact is, I am a lonely man — without wife or child — and as far as I know no relations on earth, except brother Mortimer. And I have a pretty tidy sum laid up in Yeoborough Bank, and the farm is a good farm. I do not say that the house is all that could be wished; but 'tis a pretty house, too, and one that could stand improvement. In plain words, dearie, what I want you to say now is 'yes,' and no nonsense, — for what I am doing," his voice became quite husky at this point, as if her propinquity really did cause him some emotion, "is asking you, point-blank, and no beating about the bush, whether you will marry me!"

Lacrima's face during this long harangue would have formed a strange picture for any old Cistercian monk shadowing that ancient room. At first she had kept unmoved her strained and tensely-strung impassivity. But by degrees, as the astounding character of the man's communication began to dawn upon her, her look changed into one of sheer blind terror. When the final fatal word crossed the farmer's lips, she put her hand to her throat as though to suppress an actual cry. She had never looked for this; — not in her wildest dreams of what destiny, in this curst place, could inflict upon her. This surpassed the worst of possible imagination! It was a deep below the deep. She found herself at first completely unable to utter a word. She could only make a vague helpless gesture with her hand as though dumbly waving the whole world away.

Then at last with a terrible effort she broke the silence.

"What you say is utterly — utterly impossible! It is — it is too —"

She could not go on. But she had said enough to carry, even to a brain composed of pure clay, the conviction that the acquiescence he demanded was not a thing to be easily won. He thought of his brother-in-law's enigmatic note. Possibly the owner of Leo's Hill had ways of persuading recalcitrant foreign girls that were quite hidden from him. The psychological irony of the thing lay in the fact that in proportion as her terror increased, his desire for her increased proportionally. Had she been willing, — had she been even passive and indifferent, — the curious temperament of Mr. Goring would have been scarcely stirred. He might have gone on pursuing her, out of spite or out of obstinacy; but the pursuit would have been no more than an interlude, a distraction, among his other affairs.

But that look of absolute terror on her face — the look of a hunted animal under the hot breath of the hounds — appealed to something profoundly deep in his nature. Oddly enough — such are the eccentricities of the human mind — the very craving to possess her which her terror excited, was accompanied by a rush of extraordinary pity for himself as the object of her distaste.

He let her pass — making no movement to interrupt her escape. He let her hurry out of the garden and into the road — without a word; but as soon as she was gone, he sat down on the wooden seat under the front of the house and resting his head upon his chin began blubbering like a great baby. Big salt tears fell from his small pig's eyes, rolled down his

tanned cheeks, and falling upon the dust caked it into little curious globules.

Two wandering ants of a yellowish species, dragging prisoner after them one of a black kind, encountered these minute globes of sand and sorrow, and explored them with interrogatory feelers.

Mingled with this feeling of pity for himself under the girl's disdain was a remarkable wave of immense tenderness and consideration for her. Short of letting her escape him, how delicately he would cherish, how tenderly he would pet and fondle her, how assiduously he would care for her! The consciousness of this emotion of soft tenderness towards the girl increased his pity for himself under the weight of the girl's contempt. How ungrateful she was! And yet that very look of terror, that stifled cry of the hunted hare, which made him so resolved to win her, produced in him an exquisite feeling of melting regard for her youth, her softness, her fragility. When she did belong to him, oh how tenderly he would treat her! How he would humour her and give her everything she could want!

The shadowy Cistercian monks would no doubt, from their clairvoyant catholic knowledge of the subtleties of the human soul, have quite understood the cause of those absurd tears caking the dust under that wooden seat. But the yellowish ants continued to be very perplexed and confused by their presence. Thunder-drops tasting of salt were no doubt as strange to them as hail-stones tasting of wine would have been to Mr. Goring. But the ants were not the only creatures amazed at this new development in the psychology of the man of clay. From one corner

of the house peeped the servant-girl, full of tremulous curiosity, and from another the idiot Bert shuffled and spied, full of most anxious and perturbed concern.

Meanwhile the innocent cause of this little drama was making her way with drooping head and dragging steps down the south drive. When she reached the house she was immediately informed by one of the servants that Mr. Romer wished to see her in the study.

She was so dazed and broken, so forlorn and indifferent, that she made her way straight to this room without pause or question.

She found Mr. Romer in a most lively and affable mood. He made her sit down opposite him, and handed her chocolates out of a decorative Parisian box which lay on the table.

"Well, young lady," he said, "I know, without your telling me, that an important event has occurred! Indeed, to confess the truth, I have, for a long time, foreseen its occurrence. And what did you answer to my worthy brother's flattering proposal? It isn't every girl, in your peculiar position, who is as lucky as this. Come — don't be shy! There is no need for shyness with me. What did you say to him?"

Lacrima looked straight in front of her out of the window. She saw the waving branches of a great dark yew-tree and above it the white clouds. She felt like one whose guardian-angel has deserted her, leaving her the prey of blind elemental forces. She thought vaguely in her mind that she would make a desperate appeal to Vennie Seldom. Something in Vennie gave her a consciousness of strength.

To this strength, at the worst, she would cling for help. She was thus in a measure fortified in advance against any outburst in which her employer might indulge. But Mr. Romer indulged in no outburst.

"I suppose," he said calmly, "that I may take for granted that you have refused my good brother's offer?"

Lacrima nodded, without speaking.

"That is quite what I expected. You would not be yourself if you had not done so. And since you have done so it is of course quite impossible for me to put any pressure upon you."

He paused and carefully selecting the special kind of chocolate that appealed to him put it deliberately in his mouth.

Lacrima was so amazed at the mild tone he used and at the drift of his words, that she turned full upon him her large liquid eyes with an expression in them of something almost like gratitude. The corners of her mouth twitched. The reaction was too great. She felt she could not keep back her tears.

Mr. Romer quietly continued.

"In all these things, my dear young lady, the world presents itself as a series of bargains and compromises. My brother has made you his offer — a flattering and suitable one. In the girlish excitement of the first shock you have totally refused to listen to him. But the world moves round. Such natural moods do not last forever. They often do not last beyond the next day! In order to help you — to make it easier for you — to bring such a mood to an end, I also, in my turn, have a little proposal to make."

Lacrima's expression changed with terrible rapidity; she stared at him panic-stricken.

"My proposal is this," said Mr. Romer, quietly handing her the box of chocolates, and smiling as she waved it away. "As I said just now, the world is a place of bargains and compromises. Nothing ever occurs between human beings which is not the result of some unuttered transaction of occult diplomacy. Led by your instincts you reject my brother's offer. Led by my instincts I offer you the following persuasion to overcome your refusal."

He placed another chocolate in his mouth.

"I know well," he went on, "your regard and fondness — I might use even stronger words — for our friend Maurice Quincunx. Now what I propose is this. I will settle upon Maurice, — you shall see the draft itself and my signature upon it, — an income sufficient to enable him to live comfortably and happily, wherever he pleases, without doing a stroke of work, and without the least anxiety. I will arrange it so that he cannot touch the capital of the sum I make over to him, and has nothing to do but to sign receipts for each quarter's dividend, as the bank makes them over to him.

"The sum I will give him will be so considerable, that the income from it will amount to not less than three hundred pounds a year. With this at his disposal he will be able to live wherever he likes, either here or elsewhere. And what is more," — here Mr. Romer looked intently and significantly at the trembling girl — "what is more, he will be in a position to *marry* whenever he may desire to do so. I believe" — he could not refrain from a tone of sardonic irony

as he added this — "that you have found him not particularly well able to look after himself. I shall sign this document, rendering your friend free from financial anxiety for the rest of his life, on the day when you are married to Mr. Goring."

When he had finished speaking Lacrima continued to stare at him with a wide horror-struck gaze.

Mechanically she noticed the peculiar way in which his eyebrows met one another across a scar on his forehead. This scar and the little grey bristles that crossed it remained in her mind long afterwards, indelibly associated with the thoughts that then passed through her brain. Chief among these thoughts was a deep-lurking, heart-clutching dread of her own conscience, and a terrible shapeless fear that this subterranean conscience might debar her from the *right* to make her appeal to Vennie. From Mr. Romer's persecution she could appeal; but how could she appeal against his benevolence to her friend, even though the path of that benevolence lay over her own body?

She rose from her seat, too troubled and confused even to hate the man who thus played the part of an ironic Providence.

"Let me go," she said, waving aside once more the bright-coloured box of chocolates which he had the diabolical effrontery to offer her again. "Let me go. I want to be alone. I want to think."

He opened the door for her, and she passed out. Once out of his presence she rushed madly upstairs to her own room, flung herself on the bed, and remained, for what seemed to her like centuries of horror, without movement and without tears, staring up at the ceiling.

The luncheon bell sounded, but she did not heed it. From the open window floated in the smell of the white cluster-roses, scented like old wine, which encircled the terrace pillars. Blending with this fragrance came the interminable voice of the wood-pigeons, and every now and then a sharp wild cry, from the peacocks on the east lawn. Two — three hours passed thus, and still she did not move. A certain queer-shaped crack above the door occupied her superficial attention, very much in the same way as the scar on Mr. Romer's forehead. Any very precise formulation of her thoughts during this long period would be difficult to state.

Her mind had fallen into that confused and feverish bewilderment that comes to us in hours between sleeping and waking. The clearest image that shaped itself to her consciousness during these hours was the image of herself as dead, and, by means of her death, of Maurice Quincunx being freed from his hated office-work, and enabled to live according to his pleasure. She saw him walking to and fro among rows of evening primroses — his favourite flowers — and in place of a cabbage-leaf — so fantastic were her dreams — she saw his heavy head ornamented with a broad, new Panama-hat, purchased with the price of her death.

Her mind gave no definite shape or form to this image of herself dying. The thought of it followed so naturally from the idea of a union with the Priory-tenant, that there seemed no need to separate the two things. To marry Mr. John Goring was just a simple sentence of death. The only thing to make sure of, was that before she actually died, this

precious document, liberating her friend forever, should be signed and sealed. Oddly enough she never for a moment doubted Mr. Romer's intention of carrying out his part of the contract if she carried out hers. As he had said, the world was designed and arranged for bargains between men and women; and if her great bargain meant the putting of life itself into the scale — well! she was ready.

Strangely enough, the final issue of her feverish self-communings was a sense of deep and indescribable peace. It was more of a relief to her than anyone not acquainted with the peculiar texture of a Pariah's mind could realize, to be spared that desperate appeal to Vennie Seldom. In a dumb inarticulate way she felt that, without making such an appeal, the spirit of the Nevilton nun was supporting and strengthening her. Did Vennie know of her dilemma, she would be compelled to resort to some drastic step to stop the sacrifice, just as one would be compelled to hold out a hand of rescue to some determined suicide. But she felt in the depths of her heart that if Vennie were in her position she would make the same choice.

The long afternoon was still only half over, when — comforted and at peace with herself, as a devoted patriot might be at peace, when the throw of the dice has appointed him as his country's liberator — she rose from her recumbent position, and sitting on the edge of her bed turned over the pages of her tiny edition of St. Thomas à Kempis.

It had been long since she had opened this volume. Indeed, isolated from contact with any Catholic influence except that of the philosophical Mr. Taxater,

Lacrima had been recently drifting rather far away from the church of her fathers. This complete upheaval of her whole life threw her back upon her old faith.

Like so many other women of suppressed romantic emotions, when the moment came for some heroic sacrifice for the sake of her friend, she at once threw into the troubled waters the consecrated oil that had anointed the half-forgotten piety of her childhood.

One curious and interesting psychological fact in connection with this new trend of feeling in her, was the fact that the actual realistic horror of being, in a literal and material sense, at the mercy of Mr. John Goring never presented itself to her mind at all. Its very dreadfulness, being a thing that amounted to sheer death, blurred and softened its tangible and palpable image.

Yet it must not be supposed that she meditated definitely upon any special line of action. She formulated no plan of self-destruction. For some strange reason, it was much less the bodily terror of the idea that rose up awful and threatening before her, than its spiritual and moral counterpart.

Had Lacrima been compelled, like poor Sonia in the Russian novel, to become a harlot for the sake of those she loved, it would have been the mental rather than the physical outrage that would have weighed upon her.

She was of that curious human type which separates the body from the soul, in all these things. She had always approached life rather through her mind than through her senses, and it was in the imagination that she found both her catastrophes and

recoveries. In this particular case, the obsessing image of death had for the moment quite obliterated the more purely realistic aspect of what she was contemplating. Her feeling may perhaps be best described by saying that whenever she imaged the farmer's possession of her, it was always as if what he possessed was no more than a dead inert corpse, about whose fate none, least of all herself, could have any further care.

She had just counted the strokes of the church clock striking four, when she heard Gladys' steps in the adjoining room. She hurriedly concealed the little purple-covered volume, and lay back once more upon her pillows. She fervently prayed in her heart that Gladys might be ignorant of what had occurred, but her knowledge of the relations between father and daughter made this a very forlorn hope.

Such as it was, it was entirely dispelled as soon as the fair-haired creature glided in and sat down at the foot of her bed.

Gladys looked at her cousin with intent and luxurious interest; her expression being very much what one might suppose the countenance of a young pagan priestess to have worn, as she gazed, dreamily and sweetly, in a pause of the sacrificial procession, at some doomed heifer "lowing at the skies, and all her silken flanks with garlands dressed."

"So I hear that you are going to be married," she began at once, speaking in a slow, liquid voice, and toying indolently with her friend's shoe-strings.

"Please — please don't talk about it," murmured the Italian. "Nothing is settled yet. I would so much rather not think of it now."

"But, how silly!" cried the other, with a melodious little laugh. "Of course we must talk about it. It is so extremely exciting! I shall be seeing uncle John today and I must congratulate him. I am sure he doesn't half know how lucky he is."

Lacrima jumped up from where she lay and stepping to the window looked out over the sunlit park.

Gladys rose too, and standing behind her cousin, put her arms round her waist.

"No, I am sure he doesn't realize how sweet you are," she whispered. "You darling little thing, — you little, shy, frightened thing—you must tell me all about it! I'll try not to tease you — I really will! What a clever, naughty little girl, it has been, peeping and glancing at a poor elderly farmer and inflaming his simple heart! But all your friends are rather well advanced in age, aren't they, dear? I expect uncle John is really no older than Mr. Quincunx or James Andersen. What tricks do you use, darling, to attract all these people?

"I'll tell you what it is! It's the way you clasp your fingers, and keep groping with your hands in the air in front of you, as if you were blind. I've noticed that trick of yours for a long time. I expect it attracts them awfully! I expect they all long to take those little wrists and hold them tight! And the drooping, dragging way you walk, too; that no doubt they find quite enthralling. It has often irritated *me*, but I can quite see now why you do it. It must make them long to support you in their strong arms! What a crafty little puss she is! And I have sometimes taken her for no better than a little simpleton! I see I shall not for long be the

only person allowed to kiss our charming Lacrima! So I must make the best of my opportunities, mustn't I?"

Suiting her action to her words she turned the girl towards her with a vigorous movement, and overcoming her reluctance, embraced her softly, whispering, as she kissed her averted mouth, —

"Uncle John won't do this half so prettily as I do, will he? But oh, how you must have played your tricks upon him — cunning, cunning little thing!"

Lacrima had by this time reached the end of her endurance. With a sudden flash of genuine Italian anger she flung her cousin back, with such unexpected violence, that the elder girl would actually have fallen to the floor, if she had not encountered in her collapse the arm of the wicker chair which stood behind her.

She rose silent and malignant.

"So that's what we gentle, wily ones do, is it, when we lose our little tempers! All right, my friend, all right! I shall remember."

She walked haughtily to the door that divided their rooms.

"The sooner I am married," she cried, as a final hit, "the sooner *you* will be — and I shall be married soon — soon — soon; perhaps before this summer is out!"

Lacrima stood for some moments rigid and unmoving. Then there came over her an irresistible longing to escape from this house, and flee far off, anywhere, anyhow, so long as she could be alone with her misery, alone with her tragic resolution.

The invasion of Gladys had made this resolution

a very different thing from what it had seemed an hour ago. But she must recover herself! She must see things again in the clearer, larger light of sublime sacrifice. She must purge the baseness of her cousin's sensual magnetism out of her brain and her heart!

She hurriedly fastened on her hat, took her faded parasol, slipped the tiny St. Thomas into her dress, and ran down the great oak staircase. She hurried past the entrance without turning aside to greet the impassive Mrs. Romer, seated as usual in her accustomed place, and skirting the east lawns emerged from the little postern-gate into the park. Crossing a half-cut hayfield and responding gravely and gently to the friendly greetings of the hay-makers, she entered the Yeoborough road just below the steep ascent, between high over-shadowing hedges, of Dead Man's Lane.

Whether from her first exit from the house, she had intended to follow this path, she could hardly herself have told. It was the instinct of a woman at bay, seeking out, not the strong that could help her, but the weak that she herself could help. It was also perhaps the true Pariah impulse, which drives these victims of the powerful and the well-constituted, to find rehabilitation in the society of one another.

As she ascended the shadowy lane with its crumbling banks of sandy soil and its over-hanging trees, she felt once again how persistently this heavy luxuriant landscape dragged her earthwards and clogged the wings of her spirit. The tall grasses growing thick by the way-side enlaced themselves with the elder-bushes and dog-wood, which in their turn blended indissolubly with the lower branches

of the elms. The lane itself was but a deep shadowy path dividing a flowing sea of foliage, which seemed to pour, in a tidal wave of suffocating fertility, over the whole valley.

The Italian struggled in vain against the depressing influence of all these rank and umbrageous growths, spreading out leafy arms to catch her and groping towards her with moist adhesive tendrils. The lane was full of a warm steamy vapour, like that of a hot-house, to the heavy odour of which, every sort of verdurous growing thing offered its contribution.

There was a vague smell of funguses in the air, though none were visible; and the idea of them may only have been due to the presence of decaying wood or the moist drooping stalks of the dead flowers of the earlier season. Now and again the girl caught, wafted upon a sudden stir of wind, the indescribably sweet scent of honey-suckle — a sweetness almost overpowering in its penetrating voluptuous approach. Once, high up above her head, she saw a spray of this fragrant parasite; not golden yellow, as it is where the sun shines full upon it, but pallid and ivory-white. In a curious way it seemed as if this Nevilton scenery offered her no escape from the insidious sensuality she fled.

The indolent luxuriousness of Gladys seemed to breathe from every mossy spore and to over-hang every unclosing frond. And if Gladys was in the leaves and grass, the remoter terror of Mr. Goring was in the earth and clay. Between the two they monopolized this whole corner of the planet, and made everything between zenith and nadir their privileged pasture.

As she drew nearer to where Mr. Quincunx lived, her burdened mind sought relief in focussing itself upon him. She would be sure to find him in his garden. That she knew, because the day was Saturday. Should she tell him what had happened to her?

Ah! that was indeed the crucial question! Was it necessary that she should sacrifice herself for him without his even knowing what she did?

But he would have to know, sooner or later, of this marriage. Everyone would be talking of it. It would be bound to come to his ears.

And what would he think of her if she said nothing? What would he think of her, in any case, having accepted such a degradation?

Not to tell him at all, would throw a completely false light upon the whole transaction. It would make her appear treacherous, fickle, worldly-minded, shameless — wickedly false to her unwritten covenant with himself.

To tell him, without giving him the true motive of her sacrifice, would be, she felt sure, to bring down his bitterest reproaches on her head.

For a passing second she felt a wave of indignation against him surge up in her heart. This, however, she passionately suppressed, with the instinctive desire of a woman who is sacrificing herself to feel the object of such sacrifice worthy of what is offered.

It was not long before she reached the gate of Mr. Quincunx's garden. Yes, — there he was — with his wheel-barrow and his hoe — bending over his potatoes. She opened the gate and walked quite close up to him before he observed her. He greeted her in his usual manner, with a smile of half-cynical, half-

affectionate welcome, and taking her by the hand as he might have taken a child, he led her to the one shady spot in his garden, where, under a weeping ash, he had constructed a rough bench.

"I didn't expect you," he said, when they were seated. "I never do expect you. People like me who have only Saturday afternoons to enjoy themselves in don't expect visitors. They count the hours which are left to them before the night comes."

"But you have Sunday, my friend," she said, laying her hand upon his.

"Sunday!" Mr. Quincunx muttered. "Do you call Sunday a day? I regard Sunday as a sort of prison-exercise, when all the convicts go walking up and down and showing off their best clothes. I can neither work nor read nor think on Sunday. I have to put on my best clothes like the rest, and stand at my gate, staring at the weather and wondering what the hay-crop will be. The only interesting moments I have on Sunday are when that silly-faced Wone, or one of the Andersens, drifts this way, and we lean over my wall and abuse the gentry."

"Poor dear!" said the girl pityingly. "I expect the real truth is that you are so tired with your work all the week, that you are glad enough to rest and do nothing."

Mr. Quincunx's nostrils dilated, and his drooping moustache quivered. A smile of delicious and sardonic humour wavered over the lower portion of his face, while his grey eyes lost their sadness and gleamed with a goblin-like merriment.

"I am getting quite popular at the office," he said. "I have learnt the secret of it now."

"And what is the secret?" asked Lacrima, suppressing a queer little gasp in her throat.

"Sucking up," Mr. Quincunx answered, his face flickering with subterranean amusement, "sucking up to everyone in the place, from the manager to the office boy."

Lacrima returned to him a very wan little smile.

"I suppose you mean ingratiating yourself," she said; "you English have such funny expressions."

"Yes, ingratiating myself, pandering to them, flattering them, agreeing with them, anticipating their wishes, doing their work for them, telling lies for them, abusing God to make them laugh, introducing them to Guy de Maupassant, and even making a few light references, now and again, to what Shakespeare calls 'country-matters.'"

"I don't believe a word you say," protested Lacrima in rather a quavering voice. "I believe you hate them all and that they are all unkind to you. But I can quite imagine you have to do more work than your own."

Mr. Quincunx's countenance lost its merriment instantaneously.

"I believe you are as annoyed as Mr. Romer," he said, "that I should get on in the office. But I am past being affected by that. I know what human nature is! We are all really pleased when other people get on badly, and are sorry when they do well."

Lacrima felt as though the trees in the field opposite had suddenly reversed themselves and were waving their roots in the air.

She gave a little shiver and pressed her hand to her side.

Mr. Quincunx continued.

"Of course you don't like it when I tell you the truth. Nobody likes to hear the truth. Human beings lap up lies as pigs lap up milk. And women are worst of all in that! No woman really can love a person — not, at any rate, for long — who tells her the truth! That is why women love clergymen, because clergymen are brought up to lie. I saw you laughing and amusing yourself the other evening with Mr. Clavering — you and your friend Gladys. I went the other way, so as not to interrupt such a merry conversation."

Lacrima turned upon him at this.

"I cannot understand how you can say such things of me!" she cried. "It is too much. I won't — I won't listen to it!"

Her over-strained nerves broke down at last, and covering her face with her hands, she burst into a fit of convulsive sobs.

Mr. Quincunx rose and stood gazing at her, gloomily plucking at his beard.

"And such are women!" he thought to himself. "One can never tell them the least truth but they burst into tears."

He waited thus in silence for one or two moments, and then an expression of exquisite tenderness and sympathy came into his face. His patient grey eyes looked at her bowed head with the look of a sorrowful god. Gently he sat down beside her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Lacrima — dear — I am sorry — I oughtn't to have said that. I didn't mean it. On my solemn oath I didn't mean it! Lacrima, please don't cry. I

can't bear it when you cry. It was all absolute nonsense what I said just now. It is the devil that gets into me and makes me say those things! Lacrima — darling Lacrima — we won't tease one another any more."

Her sobs diminished under the obvious sincerity of his words. She lifted up a tear-stained face and threw her arms passionately round his neck.

"I've no one but you," she cried, "no one, no one!"

For several minutes they embraced each other in silence — the girl's breast quivering with the after-sighs of her emotion and their tears mingling together and falling on Mr. Quincunx's beard. Had Gladys Romer beheld them at that moment she would certainly have been strengthened in her healthy-minded mocking contempt for sentimental "slobbering."

When they had resumed a more normal mood their conversation continued gently and quietly.

"Of course you are right," said Mr. Quincunx. "I am not really happy at the office. Who *could* be happy in a place of that kind? But it is my life — and one has to do what one can with one's life! I have to pretend to myself that they like me there, and that I am making myself useful — otherwise I simply could not go on. I have to pretend. That's what it is! It is my pet illusion, my little fairy-story. It was that that made me get angry with you — that and the devil. One doesn't like to have one's fairy-stories broken into by the brutal truth."

"Poor dear!" said Lacrima softly, stroking his hand with a gesture of maternal tenderness.

"If there was any hope of this wretched business coming to an end," Maurice went on, "it would be

different. Then I would curse all these people to hell and have done with it. But what can I do? I am already past middle age. I shouldn't be able to get anything else if I gave it up. And I don't want to leave Nevilton while you are here."

The girl looked intently at him. Then she folded her hands on her lap and began gravely.

"I have something to tell you, Maurice dear. Something very important. What would you say if I told you that it was in my power to set you free from all this and make you happy and comfortable for the rest of your life?"

An invisible watcher from some more clairvoyant planet than ours would have been interested at that moment in reading the double weakness of two poor Pariah hearts. Lacrima, brought back from the half-insane attitudes of her heroic resolution by the intermission of natural human emotion, found herself on the brink of half-hoping that her friend would completely and indignantly refuse this shameful sacrifice.

"Surely," her heart whispered, "some other path of escape must offer itself for them both. Perhaps, after all, Vennie Seldom might discover some way."

Mr. Quincunx, on the other hand, was most thoroughly alarmed by her opening words. He feared that she was going to propose some desperate scheme by which, fleeing from Nevilton together, she was to help him earn money enough for their mutual support.

"What should I say?" he answered aloud, to the girl's question. "It would depend upon the manner in which you worked this wonderful miracle. But I warn you I am not hopeful. Things might be worse. After all I have a house to return to. I have food.

I have my books. I have you to come and pay me visits. I have my garden. In this world, when a person has a roof over his head, and someone to talk to every other day, he had better remain still and not attract the attention of the gods."

Silence followed his words. Instead of speaking, Lacrima took off her hat, and smoothed her hair away from her forehead, keeping her eyes fixed upon the ground. An immense temptation seized her to let the moment pass without revealing her secret. She could easily substitute any imaginary suggestion in place of the terrible reality. Her friend's morbid nerves would help her deception. The matter would be glossed over and be as if it had never been: be, in fact, no more than it was, a hideous nightmare of her own insane and diseased conscience.

But could the thing be so suppressed? Would it be like Nevilton to let even the possible image of such a drama pass unsnatched at by voluble tongues, unenlarged upon by malicious gossip?

He would be bound to hear of Mr. Goring's offer. That, at least, could not be concealed. And what assurance had she that Mr. Romer would not himself communicate to him the full nature of the hideous bargain? The quarry-owner might think it diplomatic to trade upon Maurice's weakness.

No — there was no help for it. She must tell him; — only praying now, in the profound depths of her poor heart, that he would not consider such an infamy even for a second. So she told him the whole story, in a low monotonous voice, keeping her head lowered and watching the progress of a minute snail laboriously ascending a stalk of grass.

Maurice Quincunx had never twiddled the point of his Elizabethan beard with more detached absorption than while listening to this astounding narration. When she had quite finished, he regarded her from head to foot with a very curious expression.

The girl breathed hard. What was he thinking? He did not at once, in a burst of righteous indignation, fling the monstrous suggestion to the winds. What was he thinking? As a matter of fact the thoughts of Mr. Quincunx had taken an extraordinary turn.

Being in his personal relation to feminine charm, of a somewhat cold temper, he had never, for all his imaginative sentiment towards his little friend, been at all swayed by any violent sensuous attraction. But the idea of such attraction having seized so strongly upon another person reacted upon him, and he looked at her, perhaps for the first time since they had met, with eyes of something more than purely sentimental regard.

This new element in his attitude towards her did not, however, issue in any excess of physical jealousy. What it did lead to, unluckily for Lacrima, was a certain queer diminution of his ideal respect for her personality. In place of focussing his attention upon the sublime sacrifice she contemplated for his sake, the events she narrated concentrated his mind upon the mere brutal and accidental fact that Mr. Goring had so desperately desired her. The mere fact of her having been so desired by such a man, changed her in his eyes. His cynical distrust of all women led him to conceive the monstrous and grotesque idea that she must in her heart be gratified by having

aroused this passion in the farmer. It did not carry him quite so far as to make him believe that she had consciously excited such emotion; but it led him to the very brink of that outrageous fantasy. Had Lacrima come to him with a shame-faced confession that she had let herself be seduced by the Priory-tenant he could hardly have gazed at her with more changed and troubled eyes. He felt the same curious mixture of sorrowful pity and remote unlawful attraction to the object of his pity, that he would have felt in a casual conversation with some luckless child of the streets. By being the occasion of Mr. Goring's passion, she became for him no less than such an unfortunate; the purer sentiment he had hitherto cherished changing into quite a different mood.

He lifted her up by the wrists and pressed her closely to him, kissing her again and again. The girl's heart went on anxiously beating. She could hardly restrain her impatience for him to speak. Why did he not speak?

Disentangling herself from his embrace with a quick feminine instinct that something was wrong, she pulled him down upon the bench by her side and taking his hand in hers looked with pitiful bewilderment into his face.

"So when this thing happens," she said, "all your troubles will be over. You will be free forever from that horrid office."

"And you," said Mr. Quincunx — his mood changing again, and his goblin-like smile twitching his nostrils, — "You will be the mistress of the Priory. Well! I suppose you will not desert me altogether when that happens!"

So that was the tone he adopted! He could afford to turn the thing into a jest — into God knows what! She let his hand drop and stared into empty space, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, understanding nothing.

This time Maurice realized that he had disappointed her; that his cynicism had carried him too far. Unfortunately the same instinct that told him he had made a fool of himself pushed him on to seek an issue from the situation by wading still further into it.

"Come — come," he said. "You and I must face this matter like people who are really free spirits, and not slaves to any ridiculous superstition. It is noble, it is sweet of you to think of marrying that brute so as to set me free. Of course if I *was* free, and you were up at the Priory, we should see a great deal more of each other than we do now. I could take one of those vacant cottages close to the church.

"Don't think — Lacrima dear," he went on, possessing himself of one of her cold hands and trying to recall her attention, "don't think that I don't realize what it is to you to have to submit to such a frightful thing. Of course we know how outrageous it is that such a marriage should be forced on you. But, after all, you and I are above these absurd popular superstitions about all these things. Every girl sooner or later hates the man she marries. It is human nature to hate the people we have to live with; and when it comes down to actual reality, all human beings are much the same. If you were forced to marry me, you would probably hate me just as much as you'll hate this poor devil. After all, what is this business of being married to people and bearing them children? It doesn't touch your

mind. It doesn't affect your soul. As old Marcus Aurelius says, our bodies are nothing! They are wretched corpses, anyway, dragged hither and thither by our imprisoned souls. It is these damned clergymen, with their lies about 'sin' and so forth, that upset women's minds. For you to be married to a man you hate, would only be like my having to go to this Yeoborough office with people I hate. You will always have, as that honest fellow Epictetus says, your own soul to retire into, whatever happens. Heavens! it strikes me as a bit of humorous revenge," — here his nostrils twitched again and the hobgoblin look reappeared — "this thought of you and me living peacefully at our ease, so near one another, and at these confounded rascals' expense!"

Lacrima staggered to her feet. "Let me go," she said. "I want to go back — away — anywhere."

Her look, her gesture, her broken words gave Mr. Quincunx a poignant shock. In one sudden illuminating flash he saw himself as he was, and his recent remarks in their true light. We all have sometimes these psychic search-light flashes of introspection; but the more healthy-minded and well-balanced among us know how to keep them in their place and how to expel them promptly and effectively.

Mr. Quincunx was not healthy-minded. He had the morbid sensitive mind of a neurotic Pariah. Hence, in place of suppressing this spiritual illumination, he allowed it to irradiate the gloomiest caverns of his being. He rose with a look of abject and miserable concern.

"Stop," he cried huskily.

She looked at him wondering, the blood returning a little to her cheeks.

"It is the Devil!" he exclaimed. "I must have the Devil in me, to say such things and to treat you like this. You are the bravest, sweetest girl in the world, and I am a brutal idiot — worse than Mr. Romer!"

He struck himself several blows upon the forehead, knocking off his hat. Lacrima could not help noticing that in place of the usual protection, some small rhubarb-leaves ornamented the interior of this appendage.

She smiled at him, through a rain of happy tears, — the first smile that day had seen upon her face.

"We are both of us absurd people, I suppose," she said, laying her hands upon his shoulders. "We ought to have some friend with a clear solid head to keep us straight."

Mr. Quincunx kissed her on the forehead and stooped down for his hat.

"Yes," he said. "We are a queer pair. I suppose we are really both a little mad. I wish there was someone we could go to."

"Couldn't you — perhaps —" said Lacrima, "say something to Mrs. Seldom? And yet I would much rather she didn't know. I would much rather no one knew!"

"I might," murmured Maurice thoughtfully; "I might tell her. But the unlucky thing is, she is so narrow-minded that she can't separate you in her thoughts from those frightful people."

"Shall I try Vennie?" whispered the girl, "or shall we—" here she looked him boldly in the face with

eager, brightening eyes—"shall we run away to London, and be married, and risk the future?"

Poor little Italian! She had never made a greater tactical blunder than when she uttered these words. Maurice Quincunx's mystic illumination had made it possible for him to exorcise his evil spirit. It could not put into his nature an energy he had not been born with. His countenance clouded.

"You don't know what you're saying," he remarked. "You don't know what a sour-tempered devil I am, and how I am sure to make any girl who lives with me miserable. You would hate me in a month more than you hate Mr. Romer, and in a year I should have either worried you into your grave or you would have run away from me. No — no — no! I should be a criminal fool to let you subject yourself to such a risk as that."

"But," pleaded the girl, with flushed cheeks, "we should be sure to find something! I could teach Italian, — and you could — oh, I am sure there are endless things you could do! Please, please, Maurice dear, let us go. Anything is better than this misery. I have got quite enough money for the journey. Look!"

She pulled out from beneath her dress a little chain purse, that hung, by a small silver chain, round her slender neck. She opened it and shook three sovereigns into the palm of her hand. "Enough for the journey," she said, "and enough to keep us for a week if we are economical. We should be sure to find something by that time."

Mr. Quincunx shook his head. It was an ironical piece of psychic malice that the very illumination

which had made him remorseful and sympathetic should have also reduced to the old level of tender sentiment the momentary passion he had felt. It was the absence in him of this sensual impulse which made the scheme she proposed seem so impossible. Had he been of a more animal nature, or had she possessed the power of arousing his senses to a more violent craving, instead of brooding, as he did, upon the mere material difficulties of such a plan, he would have plunged desperately into it and carried her off without further argument. The very purity of his temperament was her worst enemy.

Poor Lacrima! Her hands dropped once more helplessly to her side, and the old hopeless depression began to invade her heart. It seemed impossible to make her friend realize that if she refused the farmer and things went on as before, her position in Mr. Romer's establishment would become more impossible than ever. What — for instance — would become of her when this long-discussed marriage of Gladys with young Ilminster took place? Could she conceive herself going on living under that roof, with Mr. Romer continually harassing her, and his brother-in-law haunting every field she wandered into?

"It was noble of you," began her bearded friend again, resuming his work at the weeds, while she, as on a former occasion, leant against his wheel-barrow, "to think of enduring this wretched marriage for my sake. But I cannot let you do it. I should not be happy in letting you do it. I have some conscience — though you may not think so — and it would worry me to feel you were putting up with that fool's companionship just to make me com-

fortable. It would spoil my enjoyment of my freedom, to know that you were not equally free. Of course it would be paradise to me to have the money you speak of. I should be able to live exactly as I like, and these damned villagers would treat me with proper respect then. But I couldn't do it. I couldn't take my pleasure at the expense of such a strain on you. It would spoil everything!

"I don't deny, however," he went on, evidently deriving more and more virtuous satisfaction from his somewhat indecisive rejection of her sacrifice, "that it is a temptation to me. I hate that office so profoundly! You were quite right there, Lacrima. All I said about getting on with those people was damned bluff. I loathe them and they loathe me. It is simply like a kind of death, my life in that place. Yes, what you suggest is a temptation to me. I can't help feeling rather like that poor brother of the girl in 'Measure for Measure' when she comes to say that she could save his life by the loss of her virtue, and he talks about his feelings on the subject of death. She put him down fiercely enough, poor dog! She evidently thought her virtue was much more important than his life. I am glad you are just the opposite of that puritanical young woman. I shouldn't like you very much if you took her line!

"But just because you don't do that, my dear," Mr. Quincunx went on, tugging at the obstinate roots of a great dock, "I couldn't think of letting you sacrifice yourself. If you *were* like that woman in the play, and made all that damned silly fuss about your confounded virtue, I should be inclined to wish that Mr. Goring had got his hands upon you. Women

who think as much of themselves as that, *ought* to be given over to honest fellows like Mr. Goring. It's the sort of punishment they deserve for their superstitious selfishness. For it's all selfishness, of course. We know that well enough!"

He flung the defeated weed so vindictively upon his barrow that some of the earth from its roots was sprinkled into Lacrima's lap. He came to help her brush it away, and took the opportunity to kiss her again, — this time a shade more amorously.

"All this business of 'love,'" he went on, returning to his potatoes, "is nothing but the old eternal wickedness of man's nature. The only kind of love which is worth anything is the love that gets rid of sex altogether, and becomes calm and quiet and distant — like the love of a planetary spirit. Apart from this love, which is not like human love at all, everything in us is selfish. Even a mother's care for its child is selfish."

"I shall never have a child," said Lacrima in a low voice.

"I wonder what your friend James Andersen would say to all this," continued Mr. Quincunx. "Why, by the way, don't you get *him* to marry you? He would do it, no doubt, like a shot, if you gave him a little encouragement; and then make you work all day in his kitchen, as his father made his mother, so they say."

Lacrima made a hopeless gesture, and looked at the watch upon her wrist. She began to feel dizzy and sick for want of food. She had had nothing since breakfast, and the shadows were beginning to grow long.

"I know what Luke Andersen would say if we asked him," added Mr. Quincunx. "He would advise you to marry this damned farmer, wheedle his money out of him, and then sheer off with some fine youth and never see Nevilton again! Luke Andersen's the fellow for giving a person advice in these little matters. He has a head upon his shoulders, that boy! I tell you what it is, my dear, your precious Miss Gladys had better be careful! She'll be getting herself into trouble with that honest youth if she doesn't look out. I know him. He cares for no mortal soul in the world, or above the world. He's a master in the art of life! We are all infants compared with him. If you do need anyone to help you, or to help me either, I tell you Luke Andersen's the one to go to. He has more influence in this village than any living person except Romer himself, and I should be sorry for Romer if his selfishness clashed with the selfishness of that young Machiavel!"

"Do you mind," said Lacrima suddenly, "if I go into your kitchen and make myself a cup of tea? I feel rather exhausted. I expect it is the heat."

Mr. Quincunx looked intently at her, leaning upon his hoe. He had only once before — on an exceptionally cold winter's day — allowed the girl to enter the cottage.

He had a vague feeling that if he did so he would in some way commit himself, and be betrayed into a false position. He almost felt as though, if she were once comfortably established there, he would never be able to get her out again! He was nervous, too, about her seeing all his little household peculiarities. If she saw, for instance, how cheaply, how

very cheaply, he managed to live, eating no meat and economizing in sugar and butter, she might be encouraged still further in her attempts to persuade him to run away.

He was also strangely reluctant that she should get upon the track of his queer little lonely epicurean pleasures, such as his carefully guarded bottle of Scotch whiskey; his favourite shelf of mystical and Rabelaisean books; his jar of tobacco, with a piece of bread under its lid, to keep the contents moist and cool; his elaborate arrangements for holding draughts out; his polished pewter; his dainty writing-desk with its piled-up, vellum-bound journals, all labelled and laid in order; his queer-coloured oriental slippers; his array of scrupulously scrubbed pots and pans. Mr. Quincunx was extremely unwilling that his lady-love should poke her pretty fingers into all these mysteries.

What he liked, was to live in two distinct worlds: his world of sentiment with Lacrima as its solitary centre, and his world of sacramental epicurism with his kitchen-fire as its solitary centre. He was extremely unwilling that the several circumferences of these centres should intersect one another. Both were equally necessary to him. When days passed without a visit from his friend he became miserably depressed. But he saw no reason for any inartistic attempt to unite these two spheres of interest. A psychologist who defined Mr. Quincunx's temper as the temper of a hermit would have been far astray. He was profoundly dependent on human sympathy. But he liked human sympathy that kept its place. He did not like human *society*. Perhaps of all well-

known psychological types, the type of the philosopher Rousseau was the one to which he most nearly approximated. And yet, had he possessed children, Mr. Quincunx would certainly never have been persuaded to leave them at the foundling hospital. He would have lived apart from them, but he would never have parted with them. He was really a domestic sentimentalist, who loved the exquisite sensation of being alone with his own thoughts.

With all this in mind, one need feel no particular surprise that the response he gave to Lacrima's sudden request was a somewhat reluctant one. However, he did respond; and opening the cottage-doors for her, ushered her into the kitchen and put the kettle on the fire.

It puzzled him a little that she should feel no embarrassment at being alone with him in this secluded place! In the depths of his heart — like many philosophers — Mr. Quincunx, in spite of his anarchistic theories, possessed no slight vein of conventional timidity. He did not realize this in the least. Women, according to his cynical code, were the sole props of conventionality. Without women, there would be no such thing in the world. But now, brought face to face with the reckless detachment of a woman fighting for her living soul, he felt confused, uncomfortable, and disconcerted.

Lacrima waited in patient passivity, too exhausted to make any further mental or moral effort, while her friend made the tea and cut the bread-and-butter.

As soon as she had partaken of these things, her exhaustion gave place to a delicious sense — the first

she had known for many weeks — of peaceful and happy security. She put far away, into the remote background of her mind, all melancholy and tragic thoughts, and gave herself up to the peacefulness of the moment. The hands of Mr. Quincunx's clock pointed to half-past six. She had therefore a clear thirty minutes left, before she need set out on her return walk, in order to have time to dress for dinner.

"I wonder if your Miss Gladys," remarked Lacrima's host, lighting a cigarette as he sipped his tea, "will marry the Honourable Mr. Ilminster after all, or whistle him down the wind, and make up to our American friend? I notice that Dangelis is already considerably absorbed in her."

"Please, dear, don't let us talk any more about these people," begged Lacrima softly. "Let me be happy for a little while."

Mr. Quincunx stroked his beard. "You are a queer little girl," he said. "But what I should do if the gods took you away from me I have not the least idea. I should not care then whether I worked in an office or in a factory. I should not care what I did."

The girl jumped up impulsively from her seat and went over to him. Mr. Quincunx took her upon his knees as he might have taken a child and fondled her gravely and gently. The smoke of his cigarette ascended in a thin blue column above their two heads.

At that moment there was a mocking laugh at the window. Lacrima slid out of his arms and they both rose to their feet and turned indignantly.

The laughing face of Gladys Romer peered in

upon them, her eyes shining with delighted malevolence. "I saw you," she cried. "But you needn't look so cross! I like to see these things. I have been watching you for quite a long time! It has been such fun! I only hoped I could keep quiet for longer still, till one of you began to cry, or something. But you looked so funny that I couldn't help laughing. And that spoilt it all. Mr. Dangelis is at the gate. Shall I call him up? He came with me across the park. He tried to stop me from pouncing on you, but I wouldn't listen to him. He said it was a 'low-down stunt.' You know the way he talks, Lacrima!"

The two friends stood staring at the intruder in petrified horror. Then without a word they quickly issued from the cottage and crossed the garden, Neither of them spoke to Gladys; and Mr. Quincunx immdiately returned to his house as soon as he saw the American advance to greet Lacrima with his usual friendly nonchalance.

The three went off down the lane together; and the poor philosopher, staring disconsolately at the empty tea-cups of his profaned sanctuary, cursed himself, his friend, his fate, and the Powers that had appointed that fate from the beginning of the world.

CHAPTER XIV

UNDER-CURRENTS

JUNE was drawing to an end, and the days, though still free from rain, grew less and less bright. A thin veil of greyish vapour, which never became thick enough or sank low enough to resolve itself into definite clouds, offered a perpetual hindrance to the shining of the sun. The sun was present. Its influence was felt in the warmth of the air; but when it became visible, it was only in the form of a large misty disc, at which the weakest eyes might gaze without distress or discomfort.

On a certain evening when this vaporous obscurity made it impossible to ascertain the exact moment of the sun's descent and when it might be said that afternoon became twilight before men or cattle realized that the day was over, Mr. Wone was assisting his son Philip in planting geraniums in his back garden.

The Wone house was neither a cottage nor a villa. It was one of those nondescript and modest residences, which, erected in the mid-epoch of Victoria's reign, when money was circulating freely among the middle-classes, win a kind of gentle secondary mellowness in the twentieth century by reason of something solid and liberal in their original construction. It stood at the corner of the upper end of Nevilton, where, beyond the fountain-square, the road from

Yeoborough takes a certain angular turn to the north. The garden at the back of it, as with many of the cottages of the place, was larger than might have been expected, and over the low hedge which separated it from the meadows behind, the long ridge of wooded upland, with its emphatic lines of tall Scotch firs that made the southern boundary of the valley, was pleasantly and reassuringly visible.

Philip Wone worked in Yeoborough. He was a kind of junior partner in a small local firm of tombstone makers — the very firm, in fact, which under the direction of the famous Gideon, had constructed the most remarkable monument in Nevilton churchyard. It was doubtful whether he would ever attain the position of full partner in this concern, for his manner of life was eccentric, and neither his ways nor his appearance were those of a youth who succeeds in business. He was a tall pallid creature. His dark coarse hair fell in a heavy wave over his white forehead, and his hands were thin and delicate as the hands of an invalid.

He was an omnivorous reader and made incessant use of every subscription library that Yeoborough offered. His reading was of two kinds. He read romantic novels of every sort — good, bad, and indifferent — and he read the history of revolutions. There can hardly have been, in any portion of the earth's surface, a revolution with whose characters and incidents Philip was unacquainted. His chief passion was for the great French Revolution, the personalities of which were more real to him than the majority of his own friends.

Philip was by temperament and conviction an

ardent anarchist; not an anarchist of Mr. Quincunx's mild and speculative type, but of a much more formidable brand. He had also long ago consigned the idea of any Providential interference with the sequence of events upon earth, into the limbo of outworn superstitions.

It was Philip's notion, this, of planting geraniums in the back-garden. Dressed nearly always in black, and wearing a crimson tie, it was his one luxurious sensuality to place in his button-hole, as long as they were possibly available, some specimen or other of the geranium tribe, with a preference for the most flaming varieties.

The Christian Candidate regarded his son with a mixture of contempt and apprehension. He despised his lack of business ability, and he viewed his intellectual opinions as the wilful caprices of a sulky and disagreeable temper.

It was as a sort of pitying concession to the whim of a lunatic that Mr. Wone was now assisting Philip in planting these absurd geraniums. His own idea was that flower-gardens ought to be abolished altogether. He associated them with gentility and toryism and private property in land. Under the régime he would have liked to have established, all decent householders would have had liberal small holdings, where they would grow nothing but vegetables. Mr. Wone liked vegetables and ate of them very freely in their season. Flowers he regarded as the invention of the upper classes, so that their privately owned world might be decorated with exclusive festoons.

"I shall go round presently," he said to his son, "and visit all these people. I see no reason why

Taxater and Clavering, as well as the two Andersens, should not make themselves of considerable use to me. I am tired of talking to these Leo's Hill labourers. One day they *will* strike, and the next they *won't*. All they think of is their own quarrel with Lickwit. They have no thought of the general interest of the country."

"No thought of your interests, you mean," put in the son.

"With these others it is different," went on Mr. Wone, oblivious of the interruption. "It would be a real help to me if the more educated people of the place came out definitely on my side. They ought to do it. They know what this Romer is. They are thinking men. They must see that what the country wants is a real representative of the people."

"What the country wants is a little more honesty and a little less hypocrisy," remarked the son.

"It is abominable, this suppression of our Social Meeting. You have heard about that, I suppose?" pursued the candidate.

"Putting an end to your appeals to Providence, eh?" said Philip, pressing the earth down round the roots of a brilliant flower.

"I forbid you to talk like that," cried his father. "I might at least expect that *you* would do something for me. You have done nothing, since my campaign opened, but make these silly remarks."

"Why don't you pray about it?" jeered the irrepressible young man. "Mr Romer has not suppressed prayer, has he, as well as Political Prayer-Meetings?"

"They were not political!" protested the aggrieved parent. "They were profoundly religious. What

you young people do not seem to realize now-a-days is that the soul of this country is still God-fearing and religious-minded. I should myself have no hope at all for the success of this election, if I were not sure that God was intending to make His hand felt."

"Why don't you canvass God, then?" muttered the profane boy.

"I cannot allow you to talk to me in this way, Philip!" cried Mr. Wone, flinging down his trowel. "You know perfectly well that you believe as firmly as I do, in your heart. It is only that you think it impressive and original to make these silly jokes."

"Thank you, father," replied Philip. "You certainly remove my doubts with an invincible argument! But I assure you I am quite serious. Nobody with any brain believes in God in these days. God died about the same time as Mr. Gladstone."

The Christian Candidate lost his temper. "I must beg you," he said, "to keep your infidel nonsense to yourself. Your mother and I are sick of it! You had better stay in Yeoborough, and not come home at all, if you can't behave like an ordinary person and keep a civil tongue."

Philip made no answer to this ultimatum, but smiled sardonically and went on planting geraniums.

But his father was loath to let the matter drop.

"What would the state of the country be like, I wonder," he continued, "if people lost their faith in the love of a merciful Father? It is only because we feel, in spite of all appearances, the love of God must triumph in the end, that we can go on with our great movement. The love of God, young man, whatever you foolish infidels may say, is at the bottom of all

attempts to raise the people to better things. Do you think I would labour as I do in this excellent cause if I did not feel that I had the loving power of a great Heavenly Father behind me? Why do I trouble myself with politics? Because His love constrains me. Why have I brought you up so carefully — though to little profit it seems! — and have been so considerate to your mother — who, as you know, isn't always very cheerful? Because His love constrains me. Without the knowledge that His love is at the bottom of everything that happens, do you think I could endure to live at all?"

Philip Wone lifted up his head from the flower-border.

"Let me just tell you this, father, it is not the love of God, or of anyone else, that's at the bottom of our grotesque world. There is nothing at the bottom! The world goes back — without limit or boundary — upwards and downwards, and everywhere. It has no bottom, and no top either! It is all quite mad and we are all quite mad. Love? Who knows anything of love, except lovers and madmen? If these Romers and Lickwits are to be crushed, they must be crushed by force. By force, I tell you! This love of an imaginary Heavenly Father has never done anything for the revolution and never will!"

Mr. Wone, catching at a verbal triumph, regained his placable equanimity.

"Because, dear boy," he remarked, "it is not revolution that we want, but reconstruction. Force may destroy. It is only love that can rebuild."

No words can describe the self-satisfied unction

with which the Christian Candidate pronounced this oracular saying.

"Well, boy," he added, "I must be off. I want to see Taxater and Clavering and both the Andersens tonight. I might see Quincunx too. Not that I think *he* can do very much."

"There's only one way you'll get James Andersen to help you," remarked Philip, "and I doubt whether you'll bring yourself to use that."

"I suppose you mean," returned his father, "that Traffio girl, up at the House. I have heard that they have been seen together. But I thought she was going to marry John Goring."

"No, I don't mean her," said the son. "She's all right. She's a fine girl, and I am sorry for her, whether she marries Goring or not. The person I mean is little Ninsy Lintot, up at Wild Pine. She's the only one in this place who can get a civil word out of Jim Andersen."

"Ninsy?" echoed his father, "but I thought Ninsy was dead and buried. There was some one died up at Wild Pine last spring, and I made sure 'twas her."

"That was her sister Glory," affirmed Philip. "But Ninsy is delicate, too. A bad heart, they say — too bad for any thoughts of marrying. But she and Jim Andersen have been what you might call sweethearts ever since she was in short frocks."

"I have never heard of this," said Mr. Wone.

"Nor have many other people here, returned Philip, "but 'tis true, none the less. And anyone who wants to get at friend James must go to him through Ninsy Lintot."

"I am extremely surprised at what you tell me,"

said Mr. Wone. "Do you really mean that if I got this sick child to promise me Andersen's help, he really would give it?"

"Certainly I do," replied Philip. "And what is more, he would bring his brother with him."

"But his brother is thick with Miss Romer. All the village is talking about them."

"Never mind the village — father! You think too much of the village and its talk. I tell you — Miss Romer or no Miss Romer — if you get James to help you, you get Luke. I know something of the ways of those two."

A look of foxy cunning crossed the countenance of the Christian Candidate.

"Do *you* happen to have any influence with this poor Ninsy?" he asked abruptly, peering into his son's face.

Philip's pale cheeks betrayed no embarrassment.

"I know her," he said. "I like her. I lend her books. She will die before Christmas."

"I wish you would go up and see her for me then," said Mr. Wone eagerly. "It would be an excellent thing if we *could* secure the Andersens. They must have a lot of influence with the men they work with."

Philip glanced across the rich sloping meadows which led up to the base of the wooded ridge. From where they stood he could see the gloomy clump of firs and beeches which surrounded the little group of cottages known as Wild Pine.

"Very well," he said. "I don't mind. But no more of this nonsense about my not coming home! I prefer for the present" — and he gave vent to rather an ominous laugh — "to live with my dear parents.

But, mind — I can't promise anything. These Andersens are queer fellows. One never knows how things will strike them. However, we shall see. If anyone could persuade our friend James, it would be Ninsy."

The affair being thus settled, the geraniums were abandoned; and while the father proceeded down the village towards the Gables, the son mounted the slope of the hill in the direction of Wild Pine.

The path Philip followed soon became a narrow lane running between two high sandy banks, overtopped by enormous beeches. At all hours, and on every kind of day, this miniature gorge between the wooded fields was a dark and forlorn spot. On an evening of a day like the present one, it was nothing less than sinister. The sky being doubly dark above, dark with the coming on of night, and dark with the persistent cloud-veil, the accumulated shadows of this sombre road intensified the gloom to a pitch of darkness capable of exciting, in agitated nerves, an emotion bordering upon terror. Though the sun had barely sunk over Leo's Hill, between these ivy-hung banks it was as obscure as if night had already fallen.

But the obscurity of Root-Thatch Lane was nothing to the sombreness that awaited him when, arrived at the hill-top, he entered Nevil's Gully. This was a hollow basin of close-growing beech-trees, surrounded on both sides by impenetrable thickets of bramble and elder, and crossed by the path that led to Wild Pine cottages. Every geographical district has its typical and representative centre, — some characteristic spot which sums up, as it were, and focuses, in

limited bounds, qualities and attributes that are diffused in diverse proportions through the larger area. Such a centre of the Nevilton district was the place through which Philip Wone now hurried.

Nevil's Gully, however dry the weather, was never free from an overpowering sense of dampness. The soil under foot was now no longer sand but clay, and clay of a particularly adhesive kind. The beech roots, according to their habit, had created an empty space about them — a sort of blackened floor, spotted with green moss and pallid fungi. Out of this, their cold, smooth trunks emerged, like silent pillars in the crypt of a mausoleum.

The most characteristic thing, as we have noted, in the scenery of Nevilton, is its prevalent weight of heavy oppressive moisture. For some climatic or geographical reason the foliage of the place seems chillier, damper, and more filled with oozy sap, than in other localities of the West of England. Though there may have been no rain for weeks — as there had been none this particular June — the woods in this district always give one the impression of retaining an inordinate reserve of atmospheric moisture. It is this moisture, this ubiquitous dampness, that to a certain type of sun-loving nature makes the region so antipathetic, so disintegrating. Such persons have constantly the feeling of being dragged earthward by some steady centripetal pull, against which they struggle in vain. Earthward they are pulled, and the earth, that seems waiting to receive them, breathes heavy damp breaths of in-drawing voracity, like the mouth of some monster of the slime.

And if this is true of the general conditions of Nevilton geography, it is especially and accumulatively true of Nevil's Gully, which, for some reason or other, is a very epitome of such sinister gravitation. If one's latent mortality feels the drag of its clayish affinity in all quarters of this district, in Nevil's Gully it becomes conscious of such oppression as a definite demonic presence. For above the Gully and above the cottages to which the Gully leads, the umbrageous mass of entangled leafiness hangs, fold upon fold, as if it had not known the woodman's axe since the foot of man first penetrated these recesses. The beeches, to which reference has been made, are overtopped on the higher ground by ashes and sycamores, and these, in their turn, are surmounted, on the highest level of all, by colossal Scotch firs, whose forlorn grandeur gives the cottages their name.

Philip hurried, in the growing darkness, across the sepulchral gully, and pushed open the gate of the secluded cattle-yard which was the original cause of this human hamlet. The houses of men in rural districts follow the habitations of beasts. Where cattle and the stacks that supply their food can conveniently be located, there must the dwelling be of those whose business it is to tend them. The convenience of Wild Pine as a site for a spacious and protected farm-yard was sufficient reason for the erection of a human shelter for the hands by whose labour such places are maintained.

He crossed the yard with quick steps. A light burned in one of the sheds, throwing a fitful flicker upon the heaps of straw and the pools of dung-

coloured water. Some animal, there — a horse or a cow or a pig — was probably giving birth to young.

From the farm-yard he emerged into the cottage-garden, and stumbling across this, he knocked at the first door he reached. There was not the least sound in answer. Dead unbroken stillness reigned, except for an intermittent shuffling and stamping from the watcher or the watched in the farm-yard behind.

He knocked again, and even the sounds in the yard ceased. Only, high up among the trees above him, some large nocturnal bird fluttered heavily from bough to bough.

For the third time he knocked and then the door of the next house opened suddenly, emitting a long stream of light into which several startled moths instantly flew. Following the light came a woman's figure.

"If thee wants Lintot," said the voice of this figure, "thee can't see 'im till along of most an hour. He be tending a terrible sick beast."

"I want to see Ninsy," shouted Philip, knocking again on the closed door.

"Then thee must walk in and have done with it," returned the woman. "The maid be laid up with heart-spasms again and can open no doors this night, not if the Lord his own self were hammering."

Philip boldly followed her advice and entered the cottage, closing the door behind him. A faint voice from a room at the back asked him what he wanted and who he was.

"It is Philip," he answered, "may I come in and see you, Ninsy? It is Philip — Philip Wone."

He gathered from the girl's low-voiced murmur that he was welcome, and crossing the kitchen he opened the door of the further room.

He found Ninsy dressed and smiling, but lying in complete prostration upon a low horse-hair sofa. He closed the door, and moving a chair to her side, sat down in silence, gazing upon her wistfully with his great melancholy eyes.

"Don't look so peaked and pining, Philip-boy," she said, laying her white hand upon his and smiling into his face. "'Tis only the old trouble. 'Tis nothing more than what I expect. I shall be about again tomorrow or the day after. But I be real glad to see 'ee here! Father's biding down in the yard, and 'tis a lonesome place to be laid-up in, this poor old house."

Ninsy looked exquisitely fragile and slender, lying back in this tender helplessness, her chestnut-coloured hair all loose over her pillow. Philip was filled with a flood of romantic emotion. The girl had always attracted him but never so much as now. It was one of his ingrained peculiarities to find hurt and unhappy people more engaging than healthy and contented ones. He almost wished Ninsy would stop smiling and chattering so pleasantly. It only needed that she should shed tears, to turn the young man's commiseration into passion.

But Ninsy did not shed tears. She continued chatting to him in the most cheerful vein. It was only by the faintest shadow that crossed her face at intervals, that one could have known that anything serious was the matter with her. She spoke of the books he had lent her. She spoke of the

probable break-up of the weather. She talked of Lacrima Traffio.

"I think," she said, speaking with extreme earnestness, "the young foreign lady is lovely to look at. I hope she'll be happy in this marriage. They do say, poor dear, she is being driven to it. But with the gentry you never know. They aren't like us. Father says they have all their marriages thought out for them, same as royalty. I wonder who Miss Gladys will marry after all! Father has met her several times lately, walking with that American gentleman."

"Has Jim Andersen been up to see you, Ninsy," put in Mr. Wone's emissary, "since this last attack of yours?"

The fact that this question left his lips simultaneously with a rising current of emotion in his heart towards her is a proof of the fantastic complication of feeling in the young anarchist.

He fretted and chafed under the stream of her gentle impersonal talk. He longed to rouse in her some definite agitation, even though it meant the introduction of his rival's image. The fact that such agitation was likely to be a shock to her did not weigh with him. Objective consideration for people's bodily health was not one of Philip's weaknesses. His experiment met with complete success. At the mention of James Andersen's name a scarlet flush came into the girl's cheeks.

"No — yes — no!" she answered stammering. "That is — I mean — not since I have been ill. But before — several times — lately. Why do you look at me like that, Philip? You're not angry with me, are you?"

Philip's mind was a confused arena of contradictory emotions. Among the rest, two stood out and asserted themselves — this unpardonable and remorseless desire to trouble her, to embarrass her, to make her blush yet more deeply — and a strange wild longing to be himself as ill as she was, and of the same disease, so that they might die together!

"My father wanted me to ask you," he blurted out, "whether you would use your influence over Jim to get him to help in this election business. I told my father Jim would do anything you asked him."

The girl's poor cheeks burned more deeply than ever at this.

"I wish you hadn't told him that, Philip," she said. "I wish you hadn't! You know very well I have no more influence over James than anyone else has. It was unkind of you to tell him that! Now I am afraid he'll be disappointed, for I shall never dare to worry Jim about a thing like that. *You* don't take any interest in this election, Philip, do you?"

From the tone of this last remark the young anarchist gathered the intimation that Andersen had been talking about the affair to his little friend and had been expressing opinions derogatory to Mr. Wone's campaign. She would hardly have spoken of so lively a local event in such a tone of weary disparagement, if some masculine philosopher had not been "putting ideas into her head."

"You ought to make him join in," continued Philip. "He has such influence down at the works. It would be a great help to father. We labouring people ought to stand by one another, you know."

"But I thought — I thought —," stammered poor Ninsy, pushing back her hair from her forehead, "that you had quite different opinions from Mr. Wone."

"Damn my opinions!" cried the excited youth. "What do my opinions matter? We are talking of Jim Andersen. Why doesn't he join in with the other men and help father in getting up the strike?"

"He — he doesn't believe in strikes," murmured the girl feebly.

"Why doesn't he!" cried the youth. "Does he think himself different, then, from the rest of us, because old Gideon married the daughter of a vicar? He ought to be told that he is a traitor to his class. Yes — a traitor — a turn-coat — a black-leg! That's what he is — if he won't come in. A black-leg!"

They were interrupted by a sharp knock at the outer door. The girl raised herself on her elbow and became distressingly agitated.

"Oh, I believe that *is* Jim," she cried. "What shall I do? He won't like to find you here alone with me like this. What a dreadful accident!"

Philip without a moment's delay went to the door and opened it. Yes, the visitor was James Andersen. The two men looked at one another in silence. James was the first to speak.

"So *you* are looking after our invalid?" he said. "I only heard this afternoon that she was bad again."

He did not wait for the other's response, but pushing past him went straight into Ninsy's room.

"Poor child!" he said, "Poor dear little girl! Why didn't you send a message to me? I saw your father in the yard and he told me to come on in. How are you? Why aren't you in bed? I'm sure you ought to be in bed, and not talking to such an exciting person as our friend Philip."

"She won't be talking to me much longer," threw in that youth, following his rival to the side of the girl's sofa. "I only came to ask her to do something for us in this election. She will tell you what I mean. Ask her to tell you. Don't forget! Good-bye Ninsy," and he held out his hand with a searching look into the girl's face, a look at once wistfully entreating and fiercely reproachful.

She took his hand. "Good night, Philip," she said. "Think kindly of me, and think — " this was said in a voice so low that only the young man could hear — "think kindly of Jim. Good night!"

He nodded to Andersen and went off, a sombre dangerous expression clouding the glance he threw upon the clock in the corner.

"You pay late visits, James Andersen," he called back, as he let himself out of the cottage-door.

Left alone with Ninsy, the stone-carver possessed himself of the seat vacated by the angry youth. The girl remained quiet and motionless, her hands crossed on her lap and her eyes closed.

"Poor child!" he murmured, in a voice of tender and affectionate pity. "I cannot bear to see you like this. It almost gives me a sense of shame — my being so strong and well — and you so delicate. But you will be better soon, won't you? And we will go for some of our old walks together."

Ninsy's mouth twitched a little, and big tears forced their way through her tightly shut eyelids.

"When your father comes in," he went on, "you must let me help him carry you upstairs. And I am sure you had better have the doctor tomorrow if you are not better. Won't you let me go to Yeoborough for him tonight?"

Ninsy suddenly struck the side of her sofa with her clenched hand. "I don't want the doctor!" she burst out, "and I don't want to get better. I want to end it all — that's what I want! I want to end it all."

Andersen made a movement as if to caress her, but she turned her head away.

"I am sick and tired of it all," she moaned. "I wish I were dead. Oh, I wish I were dead!"

The stone-carver knelt down by her side. "Ninsy," her murmured, "Ninsy, my child, my friend, what is it? Tell me what it is."

But the girl only went on, in a low soft wail, "I knew it would come to this. I knew it. I knew it. Oh, why was I ever born! Why wasn't it me, and not Glory, who died! I *shall* die. I *want* to die!"

Andersen rose to his feet. "Ninsy!" he said in a stern altered voice. "Stop this at once — or I shall go straight away and call your father!"

He assumed an air and tone as if quieting a petulant infant. It had its effect upon her. She swallowed down her rising fit of sobs and looked up at him with great frightened tearful eyes.

"Now, child," he said, once more seating himself, and this time successfully taking possession of a submissive little hand, "tell me what all this is about.

Tell me everything." He bent down and imprinted a kiss upon her cold wet cheek.

"It is —" she stammered, "it is that I think you are fond of that Italian girl." She hid her face in a fold of her rich auburn hair and went on. "They do tell me you walk with her when your brother goes with Miss Gladys. Don't be angry with me, Jim. I know I have no right to say these things. I know I have no claim, no power over you. But we did keep company once, Jim, didn't us? And it do stab my heart, — to hear them tell of you and she!"

James Andersen looked frowningly at the window.

The curtains were not drawn; and a dark ash-branch stretched itself across the casement like an extended threatening arm. Its form was made visible by a gap in the surrounding trees, through which a little cluster of stars faintly twinkled. The cloud veil had melted.

"What a world this is!" the stone-carver thought to himself. His tone when he spoke was irritable and aggrieved.

"How silly you are, Ninsy — with your fancies! A man can't be civil to a poor lonesome foreign wench, without your girding at him as if he had done something wrong! Of course I speak to Miss Traffio and walk with her too. What else do you expect when the poor thing is left lonesome on my hands, with Luke and Miss Gladys amusing themselves? But you needn't worry," he added, with a certain unrestrained bitterness. "It's only when Luke and his young lady are together that she and I ever meet, and I don't think they'll often be together now."

Ninsy looked at him with questioning eyes.

"He and she have quarrelled," he said curtly.

"Over the American?" asked the girl.

"Over the American."

"And you won't be walking with that foreigner any more?"

"I shan't be walking with her any more."

Ninsy sank back on her pillow with a sigh of ineffable relief. Had she been a Catholic she would have crossed herself devoutly. As it was she turned her head smilingly towards him and extended her arms. "Kiss me," she pleaded. He bent down, and she embraced him with passionate warmth.

"Then we belong to each other again, just the same as before," she said.

"Just the same as before."

"Oh, I wish that cruel doctor hadn't told me I mustn't marry. He told father it would kill me, and the other one who came said the same thing. But wouldn't it be lovely if you and I, Jim —"

She stopped suddenly, catching a glimpse of his face. Her happiness was gone in a moment.

"You don't love me. Oh, you don't love me! I know it. I have known it for many weeks! That girl has poisoned you against me — the wicked, wicked thing! It's no use denying it. I know it. I feel it, — oh, how can I bear it! How can I bear it!"

She shut her eyes once more and lay miserable and silent. The wood-carver looked gloomily out of the window. The cluster of stars now assumed a shape well-known to him. It was Orion's Belt. His thoughts swept sadly over the field of destiny.

"What a world it is!" he said to himself. "There is that boy Philip gone with a tragic heart because

his girl loves me. And I — I have to wait and wait in helplessness, and see the other — the one I care for — driven into madness. And she cares not a straw for me, who could help her, and only cares for that poor fool who cannot lift a finger. And meanwhile, Orion's Belt looks contemptuously down upon us all! Ninsy is pretty well right. The lucky people are the people who are safe out of it — the people that Orion's Belt cannot vex any more!"

He rose to his feet. "Well, child," he said, "I think I'll be going. It's no use our plaguing one another any further tonight. Things will right themselves, little one. Things will right themselves! Its a crazy world — but the story isn't finished yet.

"Don't you worry about it," he added gently, bending over her and pushing the hair back from her forehead. "Your old James hasn't deserted you yet. He loves you better than you think — better than he knows himself perhaps!"

The girl seized the hand that caressed her and pressed it against her lips. Her breast rose and fell in quick troubled breathing.

"Come again soon," she said, and then, with a wan smile, "if you care to."

Their eyes met in a long perplexed clinging farewell. He was the first to break the tension.

"Good-night, child," he said, and turning away, left the room without looking back.

While these events were occurring at Wild Pine, in the diplomatist's study at the Gables Mr. Wone was expounding to Mr. Taxater the objects and purposes of his political campaign.

Mrs. Wotnot, leaner and more taciturn than ever,

had just produced for the refreshment of the visitor a bottle of moderately good burgundy. Mr. Taxater had demanded "a little wine," in the large general manner which his housekeeper always interpreted as a request for something short of the very best. It was clear that for the treasures of innermost wine-cellars Mr. Wone was not among the privileged.

The defender of the papacy had placed his visitor so that the light of the lamp fell upon his perspiring brow, upon his watery blue eyes, and upon his drooping, sandy-coloured moustache. Mr. Taxater himself was protected by a carefully arranged screen, out of the shadow of which the Mephistophelian sanctity of his patient profile loomed forth, vague and indistinct.

Mr. Wone's mission was in his own mind tending rapidly to a satisfactory conclusion. The theologian had heard him with so much attention, had asked such searching and practical questions, had shown such sympathetic interest in all the convolutions and entanglements of the political situation, that Mr. Wone began to reproach himself for not having made use of such a capable ally earlier in the day.

"It is," he was saying, "on the general grounds of common Christian duty that I ask your help. We who recognize the importance of religion would be false to our belief if we did not join together to defeat so ungodly and worldly a candidate as this Romer turns out to be."

It must be confessed that in his heart of hearts Mr. Wone regarded Roman Catholics as far more dangerous to the community than anarchists or infidels, but he prided himself upon a discretion

worthy of apostolic inspiration in thus seeking to divide and set asunder the enemies of evangelical truth. He found the papist so intelligent a listener,— that hardly one secret of his political designs remained unshared between them.

"The socialism," he finally remarked, "which you and I are interested in, is Christian Socialism. You may be sure that in nothing I do or say there will be found the least tincture of this deplorable modern materialism. My own feeling is that the closer our efforts for the uplifting of the people are founded upon biblical doctrines the more triumphant their success will be. It is the ethical aspect of this great struggle for popular rights which I hold most near my heart. I wish to take my place in Parliament as representing not merely the intelligence of this constituency but its moral and spiritual needs — its soul, in fact, Mr. Taxater. There is no animosity in my campaign. I am scrupulous about that. I am ready, always ready, to do our opponents justice. But when they appeal to the material needs of the country, I appeal to its higher requirements — to its soul, in other words. It is for this reason that I am so glad to welcome really intelligent and highly educated men, like yourself. We who take this loftier view must of course make use of many less admirable methods. I do so myself. But it is for us to keep the higher, the more ethical considerations, always in sight.

"As I was saying to my son, this very evening, the grand thing for us all to remember is that it is only on the assumption of Divine Love being at the bottom of every confusion that we can go to work at all.

The Tory party refuse to make this assumption. They refuse to recognize the ethical substratum of the world. They treat politics as if they were a matter of merely imperial or patriotic importance. In my view politics and religion should go hand in hand. In the true democracy which I aim at establishing, all these secular theories — evidently due to the direct action of the Devil — such as Free Love and the destruction of the family — will not be tolerated for a moment.

"Let no one think," — and Mr. Wone swallowed a mouthful of wine with a gurgling sound, — "that because we attack capitalism and large estates, we have any wish to interfere with the sacredness of the home. There are, I regret to say, among some of our artisans, wild and dangerous theories of this kind, but I have always firmly discountenanced them and I always will. That is why, if I may say so, I am so well adapted to represent this district. I have the support of the large number of Liberal-minded tradesmen who would deeply regret the introduction of such immoral theories into our movement. They hold, as I hold, that this unhappy tendency to atheistic speculation among our working-classes is one of the gravest dangers to the country. They hold, as I hold, that the cynical free thought of the Tory party is best encountered, not by the equally deplorable cynicism of certain labour-leaders, but by the high Christian standards of men like — like ourselves, Mr. Taxater."

He paused for a moment and drew his hand, which certainly resembled the hand of an ethical-minded dispenser of sugar rather than that of an immoral

manual labourer, across his damp forehead. Then he began again.

"Another reason which seems to point to me, in quite a providential manner, as the candidate for this district, is the fact that I was born in Nevilton and that my father was born here before me.

"'Wone' is one of the oldest names in the church Register. There were Wones in Nevilton in the days of the Norman Conquest. I love the place — Mr. Taxater — and I believe I may say that the place loves me. I am in harmony with it, you know. I understand its people. I understand their little weaknesses. Some of these, though you may not believe it, I even may say I share.

"I love this beautiful scenery, these luscious fields, these admirable woods. I love to think of them as belonging to us — to the people who live among them — I love the voice of the doves in our dear trees, Mr. Taxater. I love the cattle in the meadows. I love the vegetables in the gardens. And I love to think" — here Mr. Wone finished his glass, and drew the back of his hand across his mouth — "I love to think of these good gifts of the Heavenly Father as being the expression of His divine bounty. Yes, if anywhere in our revered country atheism and immorality are condemned by nature herself, it is in Nevilton. The fields of Nevilton are like the fields of Canaan, they are full of the goodness of the Lord!"

"Your emotions," said the Papal Apologist at last, as his companion paused breathless, "do you credit, my dear sir. I certainly hold with you that it is important to counteract the influence of Free-Thinkers."

"But the love of God, Mr. Taxater!" cried the other, leaning forward and crossing his hands over his knees. "We must not only refute, we must construct." Mr. Wone had never felt in higher feather. Here was a man capable of really doing him justice. He wished his recalcitrant son were present!

"Construct — that is what I always say," he repeated. "We must be creative and constructive in our movement, and fix it firmly upon the Only Foundation."

He surveyed through the window the expansive heavens; and his glance encountered the same prominent constellation, which, at that very moment, but with different emotions, the agitated stone-carver was contemplating from the cottage at Wild Pine.

"You are undoubtedly correct, Mr. Wone," said his host gravely, using a tone he might have used if his interlocutor had been recommending him to buy cheese. "You are undoubtedly correct in finding the basis of the system of things in love. It is no more than what the Saints have always taught. I am also profoundly at one with you in your objection to Free Love. Love and Free Love are contradictory categories. They might even be called antinomies. There is no synthesis which reconciles them."

Mr. Wone had not the remotest idea what any of these words meant, but he felt flattered to the depths of his being. It was clear that he had been led to utter some profound philosophical maxim. He once more wished from his heart that his son could hear this conversation!

"Well, Mr. Taxater," he said, "I must now leave

you. I have other distinguished gentlemen to call upon before I retire. But I thank you for your promised support.

"It would be better, perhaps" — here he lowered his voice and looked jocose and crafty — "not to refer to our little conversation. It might be misunderstood. There is a certain prejudice, you know — unjustifiable, of course, but unfortunately, very prevalent, which makes it wiser — but I need say no more. Good-bye, Mr. Taxater — good night, sir, good night!"

And he bowed himself off and proceeded up the street to find the next victim of his evangelical discretion.

As soon as he had gone, Mr. Taxater summoned his housekeeper.

"The next time that person comes," he said, "will you explain to him, very politely, that I have been called to London? If this seems improbable, or if he has caught a glimpse of me through the window, will you please explain to him that I am engaged upon a very absorbing literary work."

Mrs. Wotnot nodded. "I kept my eyes open yesterday," the old woman remarked, in the manner of some veteran conspirator in the service of a Privy Counsellor.

"As you happened to be looking for laurel-leaves, I suppose?" said Mr. Taxater, drawing the red curtains across the window, with his expressive episcopal hand. "For laurel-leaves, Mrs. Wotnot, to flavour that excellent custard?"

The old woman nodded. "And you saw?" pursued her master.

"I saw Mr. Luke Andersen and Miss Gladys Romer."

"Were they as happy as usual — these young people," asked the theologian mildly, "or were they —otherwise?"

"They were very much what you are pleased to call otherwise," answered the old lady.

"Quarrelling in fact?" suggested the diplomat, seating himself deliberately in his arm-chair.

"Miss Gladys was crying and Mr. Luke was laughing."

The Papal Apologist waved his hand. "Thank you, Mrs. Wotnot, thank you. These things will happen, won't they — even in Nevilton? Mr. Luke laughing, and Miss Gladys crying? Your laurel-leaves were very well chosen, my friend. Let me have the rest of that custard to-night! I hope you have not brought back your rheumatism, Mrs. Wotnot, by going so far?"

The housekeeper shook her head and retired to prepare supper.

Mr. Taxater took up the book by his side and opened it thoughtfully. It was the final volume of the collected works of Joseph de Maistre.

Mr. Wone had not advanced far in the direction of the church, when he overtook Vennie Seldom walking slowly, with down-cast head, in the same direction.

Vennie had just passed an uncomfortable hour with her mother, who had been growing, during the recent days, more and more fretful and suspicious. It was partly to allay these suspicions and partly to escape from the maternal atmosphere that she had decided to be present that evening at the weekly

choir-practice, a function that she had found herself lately beginning to neglect. Mr. Wone had forgotten the choir-practice. It would interfere, he was afraid, with his desired interview with Mr. Clavering. Vennie assured him that the clergyman's presence was not essential at these times.

"He is not musical, you know. He only walks up and down the aisle and confuses things. Everybody will be glad if you take him away."

She was a little surprised at herself, even as she spoke. To depreciate her best friend in this flippant way, and to such a person, showed that her nerves were abnormally strained.

Mr. Wone did not miss the unusual tone. He had never been on anything but very distant terms with Miss Seldom, and his vanity was hugely delighted by this new manner.

"I am coming into my own," he thought to himself. "My abilities are being recognized at last, by all these exclusive people."

"I hope," he said, tentatively, "that you and your dear mother are on our side in this great national struggle. I have just been to see Mr. Taxater and, he has promised me his energetic support."

"Has he?" said Vennie in rather a startled voice. "That surprises me — a little. I know he does not admire Mr. Romer; but I thought ——"

"Oh, he is with us — heart and soul with us!" repeated the triumphant Nonconformist. "I am glad I went to him. Many of us would have been too narrow-minded to enter his house, seeing he is a papist. But I am free from such bigotry."

"And you hope to convert Mr. Clavering, too?"

"Certainly; that is what I intend. But I believe our excellent vicar needs no conversion. I have often heard him speak — at the Social Meeting, you know — and I assure you he is a true friend of the working-classes. I only wish more of his kind were like him."

"Mr. Clavering is too changeable," remarked Vennie, hardly knowing what she said. "His moods alter from day to day."

"But you yourself, dear Miss Seldom," the candidate went on. "You yourself are, I think, entirely with us?"

"I really don't know," she answered. "My interests do not lie in these directions. I sometimes doubt whether it greatly matters, one way or the other."

"Whether it matters?" cried Mr. Wone, inhaling the night-air with a sigh of protestation. "Surely, you do not take that indifferent and thoughtless attitude? A young lady of your education — of your religious feeling! Surely, you must feel that it matters profoundly! As we walk here together, through this embalmed air, full of so many agreeable scents, surely you must feel that a good and great God is making his power known at last, known and respected, through the poor means of our consecrated efforts? Forgive my speaking so freely to one of your position; but it seems to me that you must — you at least — be on our side, simply because what we are aiming at is in such complete harmony with this wonderful Love of God, diffused through all things."

It is impossible to describe the shrinking aversion

which these words produced upon the agitated nerves of Vennie. Something about the Christian candidate seemed to affect her with an actual sense of physical nausea. She could have screamed, to feel the man so near her — the dragging sound of his feet on the road, the way he breathed and cleared his throat, the manner in which his hat was tilted, all combined to irritate her unendurably. She found herself fantastically thinking how much sooner she would have married even the egregious John Goring — as Lacrima was going to do — than such a one as this. What a pass Nevilton had brought itself to — when the choice lay between a Mr. Romer and a Mr. Wone!

An overpowering wave of disgust with the whole human race swept over her — what wretched creatures they all were — every one of them! She mentally resolved that nothing — nothing on earth — should stop her entering a convent. The man talked of agreeable odours on the air. The air was poisoned, tainted, infected! It choked her to breathe it.

"I am so glad — so deeply glad, Mr. Wone continued, "to have enjoyed the privilege of this little quiet conversation. I shall never forget it. I feel as though it had brought us wonderfully, beautifully, near each other. It is on such occasions as this, that one feels how closely, how entirely, in harmony, all earnest-minded people are! Here are you, my dear young lady, the descendant of such a noble and ancient house, expressing in mute and tender silence, your sympathy with one who represents the aspirations of the poorest of the people! This is a symbolic moment. I cannot help saying so. A symbolic and consecrated moment!"

"We had better walk a little faster," remarked Miss Seldom.

"We will. We will walk faster," agreed Mr. Wone. "But you must let me put on record what this conversation has meant to me! It has made me more certain, more absolutely certain than ever, that without a deep ethical basis our great movement is doomed to hopeless failure."

The tone in which he used the word "ethical" was so irritating to Vennie, that she felt an insane longing to utter some frightful blasphemy, or even indecency, in his ears, and to rush away with a peal of hysterical laughter.

They were now at the entrance to a narrow little alley or lane which, passing a solitary cottage and an unfrequented spring, led by a short approach directly into the village-square. Half way down this lane a curious block of Leonian stone stood in the middle of the path. What the original purpose of this stone had been it were not easy to tell. The upper portion of it had apparently supported a chain, but this had long ago disappeared. At the moment when Mr. Wone and Miss Seldom reached the lane's entrance, a soft little scream came from the spot where the stone stood; and dimly, in the shadowy darkness, two forms became visible, engaged in some osbcure struggle. The scream was repeated, followed by a series of little gasps and whisperings.

Mr. Wone glanced apprehensively in the direction of these sounds and increased his pace. He was confounded with amazement when he found that Vennie had stopped as if to investigate further. The truth is, he had reduced the girl to such a pitch of unnatu-

ral revolt that, for one moment in her life, she felt glad that there were flagrant and lawless pleasures in the world.

Led by an unaccountable impulse she made several steps up the lane. The figures separated as she approached, one of them boldly advancing to meet her, while the other retreated into the shadows. The one who advanced, finding himself alone, turned and called to his companion, "Annie! Where are you? Come on, you silly girl! It's all right."

Vennie recognized the voice of Luke Andersen. She greeted him with hysterical gratitude. "I thought it was you, Mr. Andersen; but you did frighten me! I took you for a ghost. Who is that with you?"

The young stone-carver raised his hat politely. "Only our little friend Annie," he said. "I am escorting her home from Yeoborough. We have been on an errand for her mother. She's such a baby, you know, Miss Seldom, our little Annie. I love teasing her."

"I am afraid you love teasing a great many people, Mr. Andersen," said Vennie, recovering her equanimity and beginning to feel ashamed. "Here is Mr. Wone. No doubt, he will be anxious to talk politics to you. Mr. Wone!" She raised her voice as the astonished Methodist came towards them. "It is only Mr. Andersen. You had better talk to *him* of your plans. I am afraid I shall be late if I don't go on." She slipped aside as she spoke, leaving the two men together, and hurried off towards the church.

Luke Andersen shook hands with the Christian

Candidate. "How goes the campaign, the great campaign?" he said. "I wonder you haven't talked to James about it. James is a hopeless idealist. James is an admirable listener. You really ought to talk to James. I wish you *would* talk to him; and put a little of your shrewd common-sense into him! He takes the populace seriously — a thing you and I would never be such fools as to do, eh, Mr. Wone?

"I am afraid we disturbed you," remarked the Nonconformist, "Miss Seldom and I — I think you had someone with you. Miss Seldom was quite interested. We heard sounds, and she stopped."

"Oh, only Annie" — returned the young man lightly, "only little Annie. We are old friends you, know. Don't worry about Annie!"

"It is a beautiful night, is it not? remarked the Methodist, peering down the lane. Luke Andersen laughed.

"Are you by any chance, Mr. Wone, interested in astronomy? If so, perhaps you can tell me the name of that star, over there, between Perseus and Andromeda? No, no; that one — that greenish-coloured one! Do you know what that is?"

"I haven't the least idea," confessed the representative of the People "But I am a great admirer of Nature. My admiration for Nature is one of the chief motives of my life."

"I believe you," said Luke. "It is one of my own, too. I admire everything in it, without any exception."

"I hope," said Mr. Wone, reverting to the purpose that, with Nature, shared just now his dominant interest, "I hope you are also with us in our struggle

against oppression? Mr. Taxater and Miss Seldom are certainly on our side. I sometimes feel as though Nature herself, were on our side, especially on a lovely night like this, full of such balmy odours."

"I am delighted to see the struggle going on," returned the young man, emphatically. "And I am thoroughly glad to see a person like yourself at the head of it."

"Then you, too, will take a part," cried the candidate, joyfully. "This, indeed, has been a successful evening! I feel sure now that in Nevilton, at any rate, the tide will flow strongly in my favour. Next week, I have to begin a tour of the whole district. I may not be able to return for quite a long time. How happy I shall be to know that I leave the cause in such good hands! The strike is the important thing, Andersen. You and your brother must work hard to bring about the strike. It is coming. I know it is coming. But I want it soon. I want it immediately."

"The stone-carver nodded and hummed a tune. He seemed to intimate with the whole air of his elegant quiescence that the moment had arrived for Mr. Wone's departure.

The Nonconformist felt the telepathic pressure of this polite dismissal. He waved his arm. "Good night, then; good night! I am afraid I must postpone my talk with Mr. Clavering till another occasion. Remember the strike, Andersen! That is what I leave in your hands. Remember the strike!"

The noise of Mr. Wone's retreating steps was still audible when Luke returned to the stone in the middle of Splash Lane. The sky was clear now

and a faint whitish glimmer, shining on the worn surface of the stone, revealed the two deep holes in it, where the fastenings of the chain had hung. The young man tapped the stone with his stick and gave a low whistle. An amorphous heap of clothes, huddled in the hedge, stirred, and emitted a reproachful sound.

"Oh, you're there, are you? he said. "What silly nonsense is this? Get up! Let's see your face!" He stooped and pulled at the object. After a moment's struggle the flexible form of a young girl emerged into the light. She held down her head and appeared sulky and angry.

"What's the matter, Annie?" whispered the youth encircling her with his arms.

The girl shook him away. "How could you tell Miss Seldom who I was!" she murmured. "How could you do it, Luke? If it had been anybody else — but for her to know ——"

The stone-carver laughed. "Really, child, you are too ridiculous! Why, on earth, shouldn't she know, more than anyone else?"

The girl looked fiercely at him. "Because she is good," she said. "Because she is the only good person in this blasted place!"

The young man showed no astonishment at this outburst. "Come on, darling," he rejoined. "We must be getting you home. I daresay, Miss Seldom is all you think. It seemed to me, though, that she was different from usual tonight. But I expect that fool had upset her."

He let the young girl lean for a moment against the shadowy stone while he fumbled for his cigarettes

and matches. He observed her make a quick movement with her hands.

"What are you up to now?" he asked.

She gave a fierce little laugh. "There!" she cried. "I have done it!"

"What have you done?" he enquired, emitting a puff of smoke, and throwing the lighted match into the hedge.

She pressed her hands against the stone and looked up at him mischievously and triumphantly. "Look!" she said, holding out her fingers in the darkness. He surveyed her closely. "What is it? Have you scratched yourself?"

"Light a match and see!" she cried. He lit a match and examined the hand she held towards him.

"You have thrown away that ring!"

"Not *thrown* it away, Luke; not thrown it away! I have pressed it down into this hole. You can't get it out now! Nobody never can!"

He held the flickering match closely against the stone's surface. In the narrow darkness of the aperture she indicated, something bright glittered.

"But this is really annoying of you, Annie," said the stone-carver. "I told you that ring was only lent to me. She'll be asking for it back tomorrow."

"Well, you can tell her to come here and get it!"

"But this is really serious," protested Luke, trying in vain to reach the object with his outstretched fingers.

"And I have twisted my hair round it!" the girl went on, in exulting excitement, "I have twisted it tight around. It will be hard to get it off!"

Luke continued making ineffectual dives into the

hole, while she watched him gleefully. He went to the hedge and breaking off a dusty sprig of woundwort prodded the ring with its stalk.

"You can't do it" she cried, "you can't do it! You'll only push it further in!"

"Damn you, Annie!" he muttered. "This is a horrible kind of joke. I tell you, Gladys will want this comfounded thing back tomorrow. She's already asked me twice for it. She only gave it to me for fun."

The girl leaned across the stone towards him, propping herself on the palms of her hands, and laughing mischievously. "No one in this village can get that ring out of there!" she cried; "no one! And when they does, they'll find it all twisted up with my hair!" She tossed back her black locks defiantly.

Luke Anderson's thoughts ran upon scissors, pincers, willow-wands, bramble-thorns, and children's arms.

"Leave it then!" he said. "After all, I can swear I lost it. Come on, you little demon!"

They moved away; and St. Catharine's church was only striking the hour of nine, when they separated at her mother's door.

CHAPTER XV

MORTIMER ROMER

THE incredibly halcyon June which had filled the lanes and meadows of Nevilton that summer with such golden weather, gave place at last to July; and with July came tokens of a change.

The more slow-growing hay-fields were still strewn with their little lines of brown mown grass waiting its hour of "carrying," but the larger number of the pastures wore now that freshly verdant and yet curiously sad look, which fields in summer wear when they have been shorn of their first harvest. The corn in the arable-lands was beginning to stand high; wheat and barley varying their alternate ripening tints, from the rich gold of the one, to the diaphanous glaucous green, so tender and pallid, of the other. In the hedges, ragwort, knapweed and scabious had completely replaced wild-rose and elder-blossom; and in the ditches and by the margins of ponds, loosestrife and willow-herb were beginning to bud. Even the latest-sprouting among the trees carried now the full heavy burden, dark and monotonous, of the summer's prime; and the sharp, dry intermittent chirping of warblers, finches and buntings, had long since replaced, in the garden-bushes, the more flute-like cries of the earlier-nesting birds.

The shadowy woods of the Nevilton valleys, with

their thick entangled undergrowth, were less pleasant to walk in than they had been. Tall rank growths choked the wan remnants of the season's prime; and beneath sombre, indistinguishable foliage, the dry, hard-trodden paths lost their furtive enchantment. Dog-mercury, that delicate child of the undershadows, was no more now than a gross mass of tarnished leaves. Enchanter's nightshade took the place of pink-campion; only to yield, in its turn, to viper's bugloss and flea-bane.

As the shy gods of the year's tender birth receded before these ranker maturings, humanity became more prominent. Print-frocked maidens assisted the sheep in treading the slopes of Leo's Hill into earthy grassless patches. Bits of dirty paper and the litter of careless picnickers strewed the most shadowy recesses. Smart youths flicked town-bought canes in places where, a few weeks before, the squirrel had gambolled undisturbed, and the wood-pecker had deepened the magical silence by his patent labour. Where recently, amid shadowy moss "soft as sleep," the delicate petals of the fragile wood-sorrel had breathed untroubled in their enchanted aisles of leafy twilight, one found oneself reading, upon torn card-board boxes, highly-coloured messages to the Human Race from energetic Tradesmen. July had replaced June. The gods of Humanity had replaced the gods of Nature; and the interlude between hay-harvest and wheat-harvest had brought the dog-star Sirius into his diurnal ascendance.

The project of Lacrima's union with Mr. John Goring remained, so to speak, "in the air." The village assumed it as a certainty; Mr. Quincunx re-

garded it as a probability; and Mr. Goring himself, enjoying his yearly session of agreeable leisure, meditated upon it day and night.

Lacrima had fallen into a curious lassitude with regard to the whole matter. In these July days, especially now that the sky was over-cast by clouds and heavy rains seemed imminent, she appeared to lose all care or interest in her own life. Her mood followed the mood of the weather. If some desperate deluge of disaster was brooding in the distance, she felt tempted to cry out, "Let it fall!"

Mr. Quincunx's feelings on the subject remained a mystery to her. He neither seemed definitely to accept her sacrifice, nor to reject it. He did not really — so she could not help telling herself — visualize the horror of the thing, as it affected her, in any substantial degree. He often made a joke of it; and kept quoting cynical and worldly suggestions, from the lips of Luke Andersen.

On the other hand, both from Mr. Romer and the farmer, she received quiet, persistent and inexorable pressure; though to do the latter justice, he made no further attempts to treat her roughly or familiarly.

She had gone so far once — in a mood of panic-stricken aversion, following upon a conversation with Gladys — as actually to walk to the vicarage gate, with the definite idea of appealing to Vennie; but it chanced that in place of Vennie she had observed Mrs. Seldom moving among her flower-beds, and the grave austerity of the aristocratic old lady had taken all resolution from her and made her retrace her steps.

It must also be confessed that her dislike and fear of Gladys had grown to dimensions bordering upon monomania. The elder girl at once hypnotized and paralyzed her. Her sensuality, her feline caprices, her elaborately cherished hatred, reduced the Italian to such helpless misery, that any change — even the horror of this marriage — assumed the likeness of a desirable relief.

It is also true that by gradual degrees,—for women, however little prone to abstract thought, are quick to turn the theories of those they love into living practice, — she had come to regard the mere physical terror of this momentous plunge as a less insurmountable barrier than she had felt at first. Without precisely intending it, Mr. Quincunx had really, in a measure — particularly since he himself had come to frequent the society of Luke Andersen — achieved what might have conventionally been called the "corruption" of Lacrima's mind. She found herself on several occasions imagining what she would really feel, if, escaped for an afternoon from her Priory duties, she were slipping off to meet her friend in Camel's Cover or Badger's Bottom.

When the suggestion had been first made to her of this monstrous marriage, it had seemed nothing short of a sentence of death, and beyond the actual consummation of it, she had never dreamed of looking. But all this had now imperceptibly changed. Many an evening as she sat with her work by Mrs. Romer's side, watching Gladys and her father play cards, the thought came over her that she might just as well enjoy the comparative independence of having her own house and her own associations —

even though the price of them *were* the society of such a lump of clay — as live this wretched half-life without hope or aim.

Other moods arrived when the thought of having children of her own came to her with something more than a mere sense of escape; came to her with the enlargement of an opening horizon. She recalled the many meandering discourses which Mr. Quincunx had addressed to her upon this subject. They had not affected her woman's instincts; but they had lodged in her mind. A girl's children, so her friend had often maintained, do not belong to the father at all. The father is nothing — a mere irrelevant incident, a mere chance. The mother alone — the mother always — has the rights and pleasures, as she has the responsibilities and pains of the parental relation. She even recalled one occasion of twilight philosophizing in the potato-bed, when Mr. Quincunx had gone so far as to maintain the unscientific thesis that children, born where there is no love, inherit character, appearance, tastes, everything — from the mother.

Lacrima had a dim suspicion that some of these less pious theories were due to the perverse Luke, who, as the cloudier July days overcast his evening rambles, had acquired the habit of strolling at nightfall into Mr. Quincunx's kitchen. Once indeed she was certain she discerned the trail of this plausible heathen in her friend's words. Mr. Quincunx, with one of his peculiarly goblin-like leers, had intimated — in jest indeed, but with a searching look into her face that it would be no very difficult task to deceive, — in shrewd Panurgian roguery, this clumsy clown.

His words at the time had hurt and shocked her; and her reaction from them had led to the spoiling of a pleasant conversation; but they invaded afterwards, more deeply than she would have cared to confess, her hours of dreamy solitude.

Her southern imagination, free from both the grossness and the hypocrisy of the Nevilton mind, was much readier to wander upon an antinomian path — at least in its wayward fancies — than it would have been, had circumstances not led her away from her inherited faith.

While the sensuality of Gladys left her absolutely untouched, the anarchistic theories of her friend — especially now they had been fortified and directed by the insidious Luke — gave her intelligence many queer and lawless topics of solitary brooding. Her senses, her instincts, were as pure and unsophisticated as ever; but her conscience was besieged and threatened. It was indeed a queer rôle — this, which fate laid upon Mr. Quincunx — the rôle of undermining the reluctance of his own sweetheart to make a loveless marriage — but it was one for which his curious lack of physical passion singularly fitted him.

Had Vennie Seldom or Hugh Clavering been aware of the condition of affairs they would have condemned Mr. Quincunx in the most wholesale manner. Clavering would probably have been tempted to apply to him some of the most abusive language in the dictionary. But it is extremely questionable whether this judgment of theirs would have been justified.

A more enlightened planetary observer, initiated

into the labyrinthine hearts of men, might well have pointed out that Mr. Quincunx's theories were largely a matter of pure speculation, humorously remote from any contact with reality. He might also have reminded these indignant ones that Mr. Quincunx quite genuinely laboured under the illusion — if it were an illusion — that for his friend to be mistress of the Priory and free of her dependence on the Romers was a thing eminently desirable, and worth the price she paid for it. Such an invisible clairvoyant might even have surmised, what no one in Nevilton who knew of Mr. Romer's offer would for one second have believed; namely, that he would have given her the same advice had there been no such offer, simply on the general ground of binding her permanently to the place.

The fact, however, remained, that by adopting this ambiguous and evasive attitude Mr. Quincunx reduced the more heroic and romantic aspect of the girl's sacrifice to the lowest possible level, and flung her into a mood of reckless and spiritless indifference. She was brought to the point of losing all interest in her own fate and of simply relapsing upon the tide of events.

It was precisely to this condition that Mr. Romer had desired to bring her. When she had first attracted him, and had fallen into his hands, there had been certain psychological contests between them, in which the quarry-owner had by no means emerged victorious. It was the rankling memory of these contests — contests spiritual rather than material — which had issued in his gloomy hatred of her and his longing to corrupt her mind and humiliate her soul.

This corruption, this humiliation had been long in coming. It had seemed out of his own power and out of the power of his feline daughter to bring it about; but this felicitous plan of using the girl's own friend to assist her moral disentegration appeared to have changed the issue very completely.

Mr. Romer, watching her from day to day, became more and more certain that her integral soul, the inmost fortress of her self-respect, was yielding inch by inch. She had flung the rudder down; and was drifting upon the tide.

It might have been a matter of surprise to some ill-judging psychologists that a Napoleonic intriguer, of the quarry-owner's type, should ever have entered upon a struggle apparently so unequal and unimportant as that for the mere integrity of a solitary girl's spirit. Such a judgment would display little knowledge of the darker possibilities of human character. Resistance is resistance, from whatever quarter it comes; and the fragile soul of a helpless Pariah may be just as capable of provoking the aggressive instincts of a born master of men as the most obdurate of commercial rivals.

There are certain psychic oppositions to our will, which, when once they have been encountered, remain indelibly in the memory as a challenge and a defiance, until their provocation has been wiped out in their defeat. It matters nothing that such oppositions should spring from weak or trifling quarters. We have been baffled, thwarted, fooled; and we cannot recover the feeling of identity with ourselves, until, like a satisfied tidal wave, our will has drowned

completely the barricades that defied it. It matters nothing if at the beginning, what we were thwarted by was a mere trifle, a straw upon the wind, a feather in the breeze. The point is that our will, in flowing outwards, at its capricious pleasure, met with opposition — met with resistance. We do not really recover our self-esteem until every memory of such an event has been obliterated by a complete revenge.

It is useless to object that a powerful ambitious man of the Romer mould, contending Atlas-like under a weight of enormous schemes, was not one to harbour such long-lingering rancour against a mere Pariah. There was more in the thing than appears on the surface. The brains of mortal men are queer crucibles, and the smouldering fires that heat them are driven by capricious and wanton guests. Lacrima's old defeat of the owner of Leo's Hill — a defeat into which there is no need to descend now, for its "terrain" was remote from our present stage — had been a defeat upon what might be called a subliminal or interior plane.

It was almost as if he had encountered her and she had encountered him, not only in the past of this particular life, but a remoter past — in a past of some pre-natal incarnation. There are — as is well-known, many instances of this unfathomable conflict between certain human types — types that seem to *find* one another, that seem to be drawn to one another, by some pre-ordained necessity in the occult influences of mortal fate. It matters nothing in regard to such a conflict, that on one side should be strength, power and position, and on the other weak-

ness and helplessness. The soul is the soul, and has its own laws.

It is a case of what a true initiate into the secrets of our terrestrial drama might entitle Planetary Opposition. By some hidden law of planetary opposition, this frail child of the Apennine ridges was destined to provoke, to an apparently quite unequal struggle, this formidable schemer from the money-markets of London.

In these strange pre-natal attractions and repulsions between men and women, the mere conventional differences of rank and social importance are as nothing and less than nothing.

Vast unfathomable tides of cosmic conflict drive us all backwards and forwards; and if under the ascendance of Sirius in the track of the Sun, the master of Nevilton found himself devoting more energy to the humiliation of his daughter's companion than to his election to the British Parliament, one can only remember that both of them — the strong and the weak — were merely puppets and pawns of elemental forces, compared with which he, as well as she, was as the chaff before the wind.

It was one of the peculiarities of this Nevilton valley to draw to itself, as we have already hinted, and focus strangely in itself, these airy and elemental oppositions. To rise above the clash of the Two Mythologies on this spot, with all their planetary "auxiliar gods," one would have had to ascend incredibly high into that star-sown space above — perhaps so high, that the whole solar system, rushing madly through the ether towards the constellation of Hercules, would have

shown itself as less than a cluster of wayward fireflies. From a height as supreme as this, the difference between Mortimer Romer and Lacrima Traffio would have been less than the difference between two summer-midges transacting their affairs on the edge of a reed in Auber Lake.

Important or unimportant, however, the struggle went on; and, as July advanced, seemed to tend more and more to Mr. Romer's advantage. Precisely what he desired to happen was indeed happening — Lacrima's soul was disintegrating; her powers of resistance were diminishing; and a reckless carelessness about her personal fate was taking the place of her old sensitive apprehensions.

Another important matter went well at this time for Mr. Romer. His daughter became formally engaged to the wealthy American. Dangelis had been pressing her, for many weeks, to come to some definite decision, between himself and Lord Tintinhull's heir, and she had at last made up her mind and given him her promise.

The Romers were enchanted at this new development. Mrs. Romer had always disliked the thought of having to enter into closer relations with the aristocracy — relations for which she was so obviously unsuited; and Ralph Dangelis fitted in exactly with her idea of what her son-in-law should be.

Mr. Romer, too, found in Dangelis just the sort of son he had always longed for. He had quite recognized, by this time, that the "artistic" tastes of the American and his unusual talent interfered in no way with the possession of a very shrewd intellectual capacity. Dangelis had indeed all the qualities that

Mr. Romer most admired. He was strong. He was clever. He was an entertaining companion. He was at once very formidable and very good-tempered. And he was immensely rich.

It would have annoyed him to see Gladys dominate a man of this sort with her capricious ways. But he had not the remotest fear that she would dominate this citizen of Ohio. Dangelis would pet her and spoil her and deluge her with money, but keep a firm and untroubled hand over her; and that exactly suited Mr. Romer's wishes. The man's wealth would also be an immense help to himself in his financial undertakings. Together they would be able to engineer colossal and world-shaking schemes.

It was a satisfaction, too, to think that, when he died, his loved quarries on Leo's Hill and his historic Leonian House should fall into the hands, not of these Ilchesters and Ilminsters and Evershots — families whose pretensions he hated and derided — but of an honest descendant of plain business men of his own class.

It was Mrs. Romer, and not her husband, who uttered a lament that the House after their death should no longer be the property of one of their own name. She proposed that Gladys' American should be induced to change his name. But Mr. Romer would hear nothing of this. His system was the old imperial Roman system, of succession by adoption. The man who could deal with the Legions, the man who was strong enough to suppress strikes on Leo's Hill, and cope successfully with such rascals as this voluble Wone, was the man to inherit Nevilton! Be his patronymic what you please, such a man was

Cæsar. Himself, a new-comer, risen from nothing, and contemptuous of all tradition, it had constantly been a matter of serious annoyance to him that the wealth he had amassed should only go to swell the pride of these fatuous landed gentry. It delighted him to think that Gladys' children — the future inheritors of his labour — should be, on their father's side also, from new and untraditional stock. It gave him immense satisfaction to think of disappointing Lord Tintinhull, who no doubt had long ago told his friends how sad it was that his son had got entangled with that girl at Nevilton; but how nice it was that Nevilton House should in the future take its proper place in the county.

There was one cloud on Mr. Romer's horizon at this moment, and that cloud was composed of vapours spun from the brain of his parliamentary rival, the eloquent Methodist.

Mr. Wone had long been at work among the Leo's Hill quarry-men, encouraging them to strike. Until the second week in July his efforts had been fruitless; but with the change in the weather to which we have referred, the strike came. It had already lasted some seven or eight days, when a Saturday arrived which had been selected, several months before, for a great political gathering on the summit of Leo's Hill. This was a meeting of radicals and socialists to further the cause of Mr. Wone's campaign.

Leo's Hill had been, for many generations, the site of such local gatherings. These gatherings were not confined to political demonstrators. They were usually attended by circus-men and other caterers to proletarian amusement; and were often quite as

lively, in their accompaniments of feasting and festivity, as any country fair.

The actual speaking took place at the extreme northern end of the hill, where there was a singular and convenient feature, lending itself to such assemblies, in the formation of the ground. This was the grassy outline, still emphasizing quite distinctly its ancient form, of the military Roman amphitheatre attached to the camp. Locally the place was known as "the Frying-pan", from its marked and grotesque resemblance to that utensil; but no base culinary appellation, issue of Anglo-Saxon unimaginativeness, could conceal the formidable classic moulding of its well-known shape — the shape of the imperial colisseum.

Between the Frying-pan and the southern side of the hill, where the bulk of the quarries were, rose a solitary stone building. One hardly expected the presence of such a building in such a place, for it was a considerable-sized inn; but the suitableness of the grassy expanses of the ancient camp for all manner of tourist-jaunts accounted for its erection; and doubtless it served a good purpose in softening with interludes of refreshment the labours of the quarry-men.

It was the presence of this admirable tavern so near the voice of the orator, that led Mr. Romer, himself, to stroll, on that Saturday, in the direction of his rival's demonstration. Though the more considerable of his quarries were at the southern end of the hill, certain new excavations, in the success of which he took exceptional interest, had been latterly made in its very centre, and within a stone's throw

of the tavern-door. The great cranes, used in this new invasion, stood out against the sky from the highest part of the hill, and assumed, especially at sunset, when their shape was rendered most emphatic, the form of enormous compasses, planted there by some gigantic architectural hand.

It was in relation to these new works that Mr. Romer, towards the close of the afternoon, found himself advancing along the narrow path that led, between clumps of bracken and furze-bushes, from the most westward of his woods to the hill's base. Mr. Lickwit had informed him that there was talk, among some of the more intransigeant of the Yeoborough socialists, about destroying these cranes. Objections had been brought against them, in recent newspaper articles, on purely æsthetic grounds. It was said they disfigured the classic outline of the hill, and interfered with a land-mark which had been a delight to every eye for unnumbered ages.

It was hardly to be supposed that the more official of the supporters of Mr. Wone would condone any such outbreak. It was unlikely that Wone himself would do so. The "Christian Candidate," as his Methodist friends called him, was in no way a man of violence. But the fact that there had been this pseudo-public criticism of the works from an unpolitical point of view might lend colour to any sort of scandal. There were plenty of bold spirits among the by-streets of Yeoborough who would have loved nothing better than to send Mr. Romer's cranes toppling over into a pit, and indeed it was the sort of adventure which would draw all the more restless portion of the meeting's audience. The possibility

was the more threatening because the presence of this kind of general fair attracted to the hill all manner of heterogeneous persons quite unconnected with the locality.

But what really influenced Mr. Romer in making his own approach to the spot, was the neighbourhood of the Half Moon. Where there was drink, he argued, people would get drunk; and where people got drunk, anything might happen. He had instituted Mr. Lickwit to remain on guard at the eastern works; and he had written to the superintendent of police suggesting the advisability of special precautions. But he felt nervous and ill at ease as he listened, from his Nevilton terrace, to the distant shouts and clamour carried to him on the west wind; and true to his Napoleonic instincts, he proceeded, without informing anyone of his intention, straight to the zone of danger.

The afternoon was very hot, though there was no sun. The wind blew in threatening gusts, and the quarry-owner noticed that the distant Quantock Moors were overhung with a dark bank of lowering clouds. It was one of those sinister days that have the power of taking all colour and all interest out of the earth's surface. The time of the year lent itself gloomily to this sombre unmasking. The furze-bushes looked like dead things. Many of them had actually been burnt in some wanton conflagration; and their prickly branches carried warped and blighted seeds. The bracken, near the path, had been dragged and trodden. Here and there its stalks protruded like thin amputated arms. The elder-bushes, caught in the wind, showed white and metallic, as

if all their leaves had been dipped in some brackish water. All the trees seemed to have something of this dull, whitish glare, which did not prevent them from remaining, in the recesses of their foliage, as drearily dark as the dark dull soil beneath them. The grass of the fields had a look congruous with the rest of the scene; a look as if it had been one large velvety pall, drawn over the whole valley.

In the valley itself, along the edges of this grassy hall, the tall clipped elm-trees stood like mourning sentinels bowing towards their dead. Drifting butterflies, principally of the species known as the "Lesser Heath" and the "Meadow-Brown," whirled past his feet as he walked, in troubled and tarnished helplessness. Here and there a weak dilapidated currant-moth, the very epitome of surrender to circumstance, tried in vain to arrest its enforced flight among the swaying stalks of grey melancholy thistles, the only living things who seemed to find the temper of the day congenial with their own.

When he reached the base of the hill, Mr. Romer was amazed at the crowd of people which the festivity had attracted to the place. He had heard them passing down the roads all day from the seclusion of his garden, and to judge by such vehicles as he had secured a glimpse of from the entrance to his drive, many of them must have come from miles away. But he had never expected a crowd like this. It seemed to cover the whole northern side of the hill, swaying to and fro, like some great stream of voracious maggots, in the body of a dead animal.

Round the cranes, in the centre of the hill, the crowd seemed especially thick. He made out the

presence there of several large caravans, and he heard the music of a merry-go-round from that direction. This latter sound, in its metallic and ferocious gaiety, seemed especially adapted to the character of the scene. It seemed like the very voice of some savage Dionysian helot-feast, celebrated in defiance of all constituted authority. It was such music as Caliban would have loved.

Unwilling to arouse unnecessary anger by making his presence known, while there was no cause, Mr. Romer left the Half Moon on his right, and crossing the brow of the hill diagonally, by a winding path that encircled the grassy hollows of innumerable ancient quarries, arrived at the foot of an immense circular tumulus which dominated the whole scene. This indeed was the highest point of Leo's Hill, and from its summit one looked far away towards the Bristol Channel in one direction, and far away towards the English Channel in another. It was, as it were, the very navel and pivot of that historic region. From this spot one obtained a sort of birds-eye view of the whole surface of Leo's Hill.

Here Mr. Romer found himself quite alone, and from here, with hands clasped behind him, he surveyed the scene with a grave satiric smile. He could see his new works with the immense cranes reaching into the sky above them. He could see the swaying crowd round the amphitheatre at the extreme corner of the promontory; and he could see, embosomed in trees to the left of Nevilton's Mount, a portion of his own Elizabethan dwelling.

Mr. Romer felt strong and confident as he looked down on all these things. He always seemed to renew

the forces of his being when he visited this grass-covered repository of his wealth and influence. Leo's Hill suited his temper, and he felt as though he suited the temper of Leo's Hill. Between the man who exploited the stone, and the great reservoir of the stone he exploited, there seemed an illimitable affinity.

He looked down with grim and humorous contempt at the noisy crowd thus invading his sacred domain. They might harangue their hearts out, — those besotted sentimentalists, — he could well afford to let them talk! They might howl and dance and feast and drink, till they were as dazed as Comus' rabble, — he could afford to let them shout! Probably Mr. Wone, the "Christian Candidate," was even at that moment, making his great final appeal for election at the hands of the noble, the free, the enlightened constituency of Mid-Wessex.

Romer felt an immense wave of contempt surge through his veins for this stream of fatuous humanity as it swarmed before his eyes like an army of disturbed ants. How little their anger or their affection mattered to him — or mattered to the world at large! He would have liked to have seized in his hands some vast celestial torch and suffocated them all in its smoke, as one would choke out a wasp's nest. Their miserable little pains and pleasures were not worth the trouble Nature had taken in giving them the gift of life. Dead or alive — happy or unhappy — they were not deserving of any more consideration than a cloud of gnats that one brushed away from one's face.

The master of Leo's Hill drew a deep breath and listened to the screams of the merry-go-round.

Something in the strident machine made him think of hymn-singing and mob-religion. This Religion of Sentiment and Self-Pity with which they cloak their weakness and their petty rancour — what is it, he thought, but an excuse of escaping from the necessity of being strong and fearless and hard and formidable? It is easier — so much easier — to draw back, and go aside, and deal in paltry subterfuges and sneaking jealousies, veneered over with hypocritical unction, than to strike out and pursue one's own way drastically and boldly.

He folded his arms and frowned. What is it, he muttered to himself, this hidden Force, this Power, this God, to which they raise their vague appeals against the proud, clear, actual domination of natural law and unscrupulous strength? Is there really some other element in the world, some other fact, from which they can draw support and encouragement? There cannot be! He looked at the lowering sky above him, and at the grey thistles and little patches of thyme under his feet. All was solid, real, unyielding. There was no gap, no open door, in the stark surface of things, through which such a mystery might enter.

He found himself vaguely wondering whose grave this had originally been, this great flat tumulus, upon which he stood and hated the mob of men. There was a burnt circle in the centre of it, with blackened cinders. The place had been used for some recent national rejoicing, and they had lit a bonfire here. He supposed that there must have been a much more tremendous bonfire in the days when — perhaps before the Romans — this mound was raised

to celebrate some savage chieftain. He wondered whether, in his life-time, this long-buried, long-forgotten one had stood, even as he stood now, and cried aloud to the Earth and the Sky in sick loathing of his wretched fellow-animals.

He humorously speculated whether this man also, this ancient challenger of popular futility, had been driven to strange excesses by the provocative resistance of some feeble girl, making her mute appeals to the suppressed conscience in him, and calling in the help of tender compassionate gods? Had they softened this buried chieftain's heart, these gods of slavish souls and weak wills, before he went down into darkness? Or had he defied them to the last and died lonely, implacable, contemptuous?

The quarry-owner's ears began to grow irritated at last by these raucous metallic sounds and by the laughter and the shouting. It was so precisely as if this foolish crowd were celebrating, in drunken ecstasy, a victory won over him, and over all that was clear-edged, self-possessed, and effectual, in this confused world. He struck off the heads of some of the grey thistles with his cane, and wished they had been the heads of the Christian Candidate and his oratorical associates.

Presently his attention was excited by a tremendous hubbub at the northern extremity of the hill. The crowd seemed to have gone mad. They cheered again and again, and seemed vociferating some popular air or some marching-song. He could almost catch the words of this. The curious thing was that he could not help in his heart dallying with the strange wish that in place of being the man at the top, he

had been one of these men at the bottom. How differently he would have conducted the affair. He knew, from his dealings with the country families, how deep this revolutionary rage with established tradition could sink. He sympathized with it himself. He would have loved to have flung the whole sleek structure of society into disorder, and to have shaken these feeble rulers out of their snug seats. But this Wone had not the spirit of a wood-louse! Had he — Romer — been at this moment the arch-revolutionary, in place of the arch-tyrant, what a difference in method and result! Did they think, these idiots, that eloquent words and appeals to Justice and Charity would change the orbits of the planets?

He strode impatiently to the edge of the tumulus. Yes, there was certainly something unusual going forward. The crowd was swaying outwards, was scattering and wavering. Men were running to and fro, tossing their hats in the air and shouting. At last there really was a definite event. The whole mass of the crowd seemed to be seized simultaneously with a single impulse. It began to move. It began to move in the direction of his new quarries. The thrill of battle seized the heart of the master of Nevilton with an exultant glow. So they were really going to attempt something — the incapable sheep! This was the sort of situation he had long cried out for. To have an excuse to meet them, face to face, in a genuine insurrection, this was worthier of a man's energy than quarrelling with wretched Social Meetings.

He ran down the side of the tumulus and hastened to meet the approaching mob. By leaving the path

and skirting the edge of several disused quarries he should, he thought, easily be able to reach his new works long before they did. The tall cranes served as a guide. To his astonishment he found, on approaching his objective, that the mob had swerved, and were now streaming forward in a long wavering line, between the Half Moon tavern and the lower slopes, towards the southern end of the hill.

"Ah!" he muttered under his breath, "this is more serious! They are going to attack the offices."

By this time, the bulk of the crowd had got so far that it would have been impossible for him to intercept or anticipate them.

Among the more cautious sight-seers who, mixed with women and children, were trailing slowly in the rear, he was quite certain he made out the figures of Wone and his fellow-politicians. "Just like him," he thought. "He has stirred them up with his speeches and now he is hiding behind them! I expect he will be sneaking off home presently." The figure he supposed to be that of the Christian Candidate did, as a matter of fact, shortly after this, detach himself from the rest of his group and retire quietly and discreetly towards the path leading to Nevilton.

Romer retraced his steps as rapidly as he could. He repassed the tumulus, crossed a somewhat precipitous bank between two quarries, and emerged upon the road that skirts the western brow of the hill. This road he followed at an impetuous pace, listening, as he advanced, for any sound of destruction and violence. When he arrived at the open level between the two largest of his quarries he found himself at the edge of a surging and howling mob.

He could see over their heads the low slate roofs of his works, and he could see that someone, mounted on a large slab of stone, was haranguing the people near him, but more than this it was impossible to make out and it was extremely difficult to get any closer. The persons on the outskirts of the crowd were evidently strangers, and with no interest in the affair at all beyond excited curiosity, for he heard them asking one another the most vague and confused questions.

Presently he observed the figure of a policeman rise behind the man upon the stone and jerk him to the ground. This was followed by a bewildering uproar. Clenched hands were raised in the air, and wild cries were audible. He fancied he caught the sound of the syllable "fire."

Romer was seized with a mad lust of contest. He struggled desperately to force his way through to the front, but the entangled mass of agitated, perspiring people proved an impassable barrier.

He began hastily summing up in his mind what kind of destruction they could achieve that would cause him any serious annoyance. He remembered with relief that all the more delicate pieces of carved work were down at Nevilton Station. They could do little damage to solid blocks of stone, which were all they would find inside those wooden sheds. They might injure the machinery and the more fragile of the tools, but they could hardly do even that, unless they were aided by some of his own men. He wondered if his own men — the men on strike — were among them, or if the rioters were only roughs from Yeoborough. Let them burn the sheds down!

He did not value the sheds. They could be replaced tomorrow. Their utmost worth was hardly the price of a dozen bottles of champagne. It gave him a thrill of grim satisfaction to think of the ineffectualness of this horde of gesticulating two-legged creatures, making vain assaults upon slabs of impervious rock Man against Stone! It was a pleasant and symbolic struggle. And it could only have one issue.

Finding it impossible to move forward, and not caring to be observed by anyone who knew him hemmed in in this ridiculous manner among staring females and jocose youths, Romer edged himself backwards, and, hot and breathless, got clear of the crowd.

The physical exhaustion of this effort — for only a man of considerable strength could have advanced an inch through such a dense mass — had materially diminished his thirst for a personal encounter. He smiled to himself to think how humorous it would be if he could, even now, overtake the escaping Mr. Wone, and offer his rival restorative refreshment, in the cool shades of his garden! For the prime originals of this absurd riot to be drinking claret-cup upon a grassy lawn, while the misled and deluded populace were battering their heads against the stony heart of Leo's Hill, struck Mr. Romer as a curiously suitable climax to the days' entertainment. Hardly thinking of what he did, he clambered up the side of a steep bank, where a group of children were playing, and looked across the valley. Surely that solitary black figure retreating so furtively, so innocently, along the path towards the wood, could be no one but the Christian Candidate!

Mr. Romer burst out laughing. The discreet fugitive looked so absurdly characteristic in his shuffling retirement, that he felt for the moment as if the whole incident were a colossal musical-comedy farce. A puff of smoke above the heads of the crowd, and a smell of burning, made him serious again. "Damn them!" he muttered. "They shall not get off without anything being done."

From his present position he was able to discern how he could get round to the sheds. On their remoter side he saw that the crowd had considerably thinned away. He made out the figures of some policemen there, bending, it appeared, over something upon the ground.

It did not take him long to descend from his post, to skirt the western side of the quarries, and to reach the spot. He found that the object upon the ground was no other than his manager Lickwit, gasping and pallid, with a streak of blood running down his face. From the policemen he learnt that an entrance had been forced into the sheds, and the more violent of the rioters — the ones who had laid Mr. Lickwit low — were now regaling themselves in that shelter upon the contents of a barrel of cider, whose hiding-place someone had unearthed. The fire was already trampled upon and extinguished. He learnt further that a messenger had been sent to summon more police to the spot, and that it was to be hoped that the revellers within the shed would continue their opportune tippling until their arrival. This, however, was not what fate intended. Reeling and shouting, the half-a-dozen joyous Calibans emerged from their retreat and proceeded to address

the people, all vociferating at the same time, and each interrupting the other. The more official and respectable among the politicians had either retired altogether from the scene or were cautiously watching it, from the safe obscurity of the general crowd, and the situation around the stone-works was completely in the hands of the rioters.

Mr. Romer, having done what he could for the comfort of his manager, who was really more frightened than hurt, turned fiercely upon the aggressors. He commanded the two remaining policemen — the third was helping Lickwit from the scene — to arrest on the spot these turbulent ruffians, who were now engaged in laying level with the ground a tool-shed adjoining the one they had entered. They were striking at the corner-beams of this erection with picks and crow-bars. Others among the crowd, pushing their less courageous neighbours forward, began throwing stones at the policemen, uttering, as they did so, yells and threats and abusive insults.

The mass of the people behind, hearing these yells, and yielding to a steady pressure from the rear, where more and more inquisitive persons kept arriving, began to sway ominously onward, crowding more and more thickly around the open space, where Mr. Romer stood, angrily regarding them.

The policemen kept looking anxiously towards the Half Moon where the road across the hill terminated. They were evidently very nervous and extremely desirous of the arrival of re-enforcements. No re-enforcements coming, however, and the destruction of property continuing, they were forced to act; and drawing their staves, they made a determined rush

upon the men attacking the shed. Had these persons not been already half-drunk, the emissaries of the law would have come off badly. As it was, they only succeeded in flinging the rioters back a few paces. The whole crowd moved forward and a volley of stones and sticks compelled the officials to retreat. In their retreat they endeavoured to carry Mr. Romer with them, assuring him, in hurried gasps, that his life itself was in danger. "They'll knock your head off, sir — the scoundrels! Phil Wone has seen you."

The pale son of Mr. Wone had indeed pushed his way to the front. He at once began an impassioned oration.

"There he is — the devil himself!" he shouted, panting with excitement. "Do for him, friends! Throw him into one of his own pits — the blood-sucker, the assassin, the murderer of the people!"

Wild memories of historic passages rushed through the young anarchist's brain. He waved his arms savagely, goading on his companions. His face was livid. Mr. Romer moved towards him, his head thrown back and a contemptuous smile upon his face.

The drunken ring leaders, recognizing their hereditary terror — the local magistrate — reeled backwards in sudden panic. Others in the front line of the crowd, knowing Mr. Romer by sight, stood stock still and gaped foolishly or tried to shuffle off unobserved. A few strangers who were there, perceiving the presence of a formidable-looking gentleman, assumed at once that he was Lord Tintinhull or the Earl of Glastonbury and made frantic efforts to escape. The crowd at the back, conscious that a reverse move-

ment had begun, became alarmed. Cries were raised that the "military" had come. "They are going to fire!" shouted one voice, and several women screamed.

Philip Wone lifted up his voice again, pointing with outstretched arm at his enemy, and calling upon the crowd to advance.

"The serpent! — the devil-fish! — the bread-stealer! — the money-eater!" he yelled. "Cast him into his own pit, bury him in his own quarries!"

It was perhaps fortunate for Mr. Romer at that moment that his adversary was this honest youth in place of a more hypocritical leader. An English crowd, even though sprinkled with a leaven of angry strikers, only grows puzzled and bewildered when it hears its enemy referred to as "devil-fish" and "assassin."

The enemy at this moment took full advantage of their bewilderment. He deliberately drew out his cigarette-case and lighting a cigarette, made a gesture as if driving back a flock of sheep. The crowd showed further signs of panic. But the young anarchist was not to be silenced.

"Look round you, friends," he shouted. "Here is this man defying you on the very spot where you work for him day and night, where your descendants will work for his descendants day and night! What are you afraid of? This man did not make this hill bring forth stone, though it is stone, instead of bread, that he would willingly give your children!"

Mr. Romer gave a sign to the policemen and approached a step nearer. The cider-drinkers had already moved off. The crowd began to melt away.

"The very earth," went on the young man, "cries aloud to you to put an end to this tyranny! Do you realize that this is the actual place where in one grand revolt the men of Mid Wessex rose against the —"

He was interrupted by a man behind him — a poacher from an outlying hamlet. "Chuck it, Phil Wone! Us knows all about this 'ere job."

Mr. Romer raised his hand. The policemen seized the young man by the arms, one on either side. He seemed hardly to notice them, and went on in a loud resonant voice that rang across the valley.

"It will end! It will end, this evil day! Already the new age is beginning. These robbers of the people had better make haste with their plundering, for the hour is approaching! Where is your priest?" — he struggled violently with his captors, turning towards the rapidly retreating crowd, "where is your vicar, — your curer of souls? He talks to you of submission, and love, and obedience, and duty. What does this man care for these things? It is under this talk of "love" that you are betrayed! It is under this talk of "duty," that your children have the bread taken from their mouths! But the hour will come; — yes, you may smile," he addressed himself directly to Mr. Romer now, "but you will not smile for long. *Your* fate is already written down! It is as sure as this rain, — as sure as this storm!"

He was silent, and making no further resistance, let himself be carried off by the two officials.

The rain he spoke of was indeed beginning. Heavy drops, precursors of what seemed likely to be a tropical deluge, fell upon the broken wood-work, upon the half-burnt bracken, upon the slabs of Leonian

stone, and upon the trampled grass. They also fell upon Mr. Romer's silver match-box as he selected another cigarette of his favourite brand, and walked slowly and smilingly away in the direction of Nevilton.

CHAPTER XVI

HULLAWAY

"I SEE," said Luke Andersen to his brother, as they sat at breakfast in the station-master's kitchen, about a fortnight after the riot on Leo's Hill, "I see that Romer has withdrawn his charge against young Wone. It seems that the magistrates set him free yesterday, on Romer's own responsibility. So the case will not come up at all. What do you make of that?"

"He is a wiser man than I imagined," said James.

"And that's not all!" cried his brother blowing the cigarette ashes from the open paper in front of him. "It appears the strike is in a good way of being settled by those damned delegates. We were idiots to trust them. I knew it. I told the men so. But they are all such hopeless fools. No doubt Romer has found some way of getting round them! The talk is now of arbitration, and a commissioner from the government. You mark my words, Daddy Jim, we shall be back working again by Monday."

"But we shall get the chief thing we wanted, after all — if Lickwit is removed," said James, rising from the table and going to the window, "I know I shall be quite satisfied myself, if I don't see that rascal's face any more."

"The poor wretch has collapsed altogether, so they said down at the inn last night," Luke put in. "My

belief is that Romer has now staked everything on getting into Parliament and is ready to do anything to propitiate the neighbourhood. If that's his line, he'll succeed. He'll out-manœuvre our friend Wone at every step. When a man of his type once tries the conciliatory game be becomes irresistible. That is what these stupid employers so rarely realize. No doubt that's his policy in stopping the process against Philip. He's a shrewd fellow this Romer — and I shouldn't wonder if, when the strike is settled, he became the most popular landlord in the country. Wone did for himself by sneaking off home that day, when things looked threatening. They were talking about that in Yeoborough. I shouldn't be surprised if it didn't lose him the election."

"I hope not," said James Andersen gazing out of the window at the gathering clouds. "I should be sorry to see that happen."

"I should be damned glad!" cried his brother, pushing back his chair and luxuriously sipping his final cup of tea. "My sympathies are all with Romer in this business. He has acted magnanimously. He has acted shrewdly. I would sooner, any day, be under the control of a man like him, than see a sentimental charlatan like Wone get into Parliament."

"You are unfair, my friend," said the elder brother, opening the lower sash of the window and letting in such a draught of rainy wind that he was immediately compelled to re-close it, "you are thoroughly unfair. Wone is not in the least a charlatan. He believes every word he says, and he says a great many things that are profoundly true. I cannot see," he went on, turning round and confronting his equable relative

with a perturbed and troubled face, "why you have got your knife into Wone in this extreme manner. Of course he is conceited and long-winded, but the man is genuinely sincere. I call him rather a pathetic figure."

"He looked pathetic enough when he sneaked off after that riot, leaving Philip in the hands of the police."

"It annoys me the way you speak," returned the elder brother, in growing irritation. "What right have you to call the one man's discretion cowardice, and the other's wise diplomacy? I don't see that it was any more cowardice for Wone to protest against a riot, than for Romer to back down before public opinion as he seems now to have done. Besides, who can blame a fellow for wanting to avoid a scene like that? I know *you* wouldn't have cared to encounter those Yeoborough roughs."

"Old Romer encountered them," retorted Luke. "They say he smoked a cigarette in their faces, and just waved them away, as if they were a cloud of gnats. I love a man who can do that sort of thing!"

"That's right!" cried the elder brother growing thoroughly angry. "That's the true Yellow Press attitude! Here we have one of your 'still, strong men,' afraid of no mob on earth! I know them — these strong men! Its easy enough to be calm and strong when you have a banking-account like Romer's, and all the police in the county on your side?"

"Brother Lickwit will not forget that afternoon," remarked Luke, taking a rose from a vase on the table and putting it into his button-hole.

"Yes, Lickwit is the scape-goat," rejoined the

other. "Lickwit will have to leave the place, broken in his nerves, and ruined in his reputation, while his master gets universal praise for magnanimity and generosity! That is the ancient trick of these crafty oppressors."

"Why do you use such grand words, Daddy Jim?" said Luke smiling and stretching out his legs. "It's all nonsense, this talk about oppressors and oppressed. The world only contains two sorts of people — the capable ones and the incapable ones. I am all on the side of the capable ones!"

"I suppose that is why you are treating little Annie Bristow so abominably!" cried James, losing all command of his temper.

Luke made an indescribable grimace which converted his countenance in a moment from that of a gentle faun to that of an ugly Satyr.

"Ho! ho!" he exclaimed, "so we are on that tack are we? And please tell me, most virtuous moralist, why I am any worse in my attitude to Annie, than you in your attitude to Ninsy? It seems to me we are in the same box over these little jobs."

"Damn you!" cried James Andersen, walking fiercely up to his brother and trembling with rage.

But Luke sipped his tea with perfect equanimity.

"It's no good damning me," he said quietly. "That will not alter the situation. The fact remains, that both of us have found our little village-girls rather a nuisance. I don't blame you. I don't blame myself. These things are inevitable. They are part of the system of the universe. Little girls have to learn — as the world moves round — that they can't have everything they want. I don't know

whether you intend to marry Ninsy? I haven't the slightest intention of marrying Annie."

"But you've been making love to her for the last two months! You told me so yourself when we met her at Hullaway!"

"And you weren't so very severe then, were you, Daddy Jim? It's only because I have annoyed you this morning that you bring all this up. As a matter of fact, Annie is far less mad about me than Ninsy is about you. She's already flirting with Bob Granger. Anyone can see she's perfectly happy. She's been happy ever since she made a fool of me over Gladys' ring. As long as a girl knows she's put you in a ridiculous position, she'll very soon console herself. No doubt she'll make Granger marry her before the summer's over. Ninsy is quite a different person. Annie and I take our little affair in precisely the same spirit. I am no more to blame than she is. But Ninsy's case is different. Ninsy is seriously and desperately in love with you. And her invalid state makes the situation a much more embarrassing one. I think my position is infinitely less complicated than yours, brother Jim!"

James Andersen's face became convulsed with fury. He stretched out his arm towards his brother, and extended a threatening fore-finger.

"Young man," he cried, "I will *never* forgive you for this!"

Having uttered these words he rushed incontinently out of the room, and, bare-headed as he was, proceeded to stride across the fields, in a direction opposite from that which led to Nevilton.

The younger brother shrugged his shoulders,

drained his tea-cup, and meditatively lit another cigarette. The stone-works being closed, he had all the day before him in which to consider this unfortunate rupture. At the present moment, however, all he did was to call their landlady — the station-master's buxom wife — and affably help her in the removal and washing up of the breakfast things.

Luke was an adept in all household matters. His supple fingers and light feminine movements were equal to almost any task, and while occupied in such things his gay and humorous conversation made any companion of his labour an enviable person. Mrs. Round, their landlady, adored him. There was nothing she would not have done at his request; and Lizzie, Betty, and Polly, her three little daughters, loved him more than they loved their own father. Having concerned himself for more than an hour with these agreeable people, Luke took his hat and stick, and strolling lazily along the railroad-line railings, surveyed with inquisitive interest the motley group of persons who were waiting, on the further side, for the approach of a train.

A little apart from the rest, seated on a bench beside a large empty basket, he observed the redoubtable Mrs. Fringe. Between this lady and himself there had existed for the last two years a sort of conspiracy of gossip. Like many other middle-aged women in Nevilton, Mrs. Fringe had made a pet and confidant of this attractive young man, who played, in spite of his mixed birth, a part almost analogous to that of an affable and ingratiating cadet of some noble family.

He passed through the turn-stile, crossed the track,

and advanced slowly up the platform. His plump Gossip, observing him afar off, rose and moved to meet him, her basket swinging in her hand and a radiant smile upon her face. It was like an encounter between some Pantagruelian courtier and some colossal Gargamelle. They stood together, in the wind, at the extreme edge of the platform. Luke, who was dressed so well that it would have been impossible to distinguish him from any golden youth from Oxford or Cambridge, whispered shameless scandal into the lady's ears, from beneath the shadow of his panama-hat. She on her side was equally confidential.

"There was a pretty scene down our way last night," she said. "Miss Seldom came in with some books for my young Reverend and, Lord! they did have an ado. I heard 'un shouting at one another as though them were rampin' mad. My master 'ee were hollerin' Holy Scripture like as he were dazed, and the young lady she were answerin' 'im with God knows what. From all I could gather of it, that girl had got some devil's tale on Miss Gladys. 'Tweren't as though she did actually name her by name, as you might say, but she pulled her hair and scratched her like any crazy cat, sideways-like and cross-wise. It seems she'd got hold of some story about that foreign young woman and Miss Gladys having her knife into 'er, but I saw well enough what was at the bottom of it and I won't conceal it from 'ee, my dear. She do want 'im for herself. That's the long and short. She do want 'im for herself!"

"What were they disputing about?" asked Luke eagerly. "Did you hear their words?"

"'Tis no good arstin' me about their words," replied Mrs. Fringe. "Those long-windy dilly-dallies do sound to me no more than the burbering of blow-flies. God save us from such words! I'm not a reading woman and I don't care who knows it. But I know when a wench is moon-daft on a fellow. I knows that, my dear, and I knows when she's got a tale on another girl!"

"Did she talk about Catholicism to him?" enquired Luke.

"I won't say as she didn't bring something of that sort in," replied his friend. "But 'twas Miss Gladys wot worried 'er. Any fool could see that. 'Tis my experience that when a girl and a fellow get hot on any of these dilly-dally argimints, there's always some other maid biding round the corner."

"I've just had a row with James," remarked the stone-carver. "He's gone off in a fury over towards Hullaway."

Mrs Fringe put down her basket and glanced up and down the platform. Then she laid her hand on the young man's arm.

"I wouldn't say what I do now say, to anyone, but thee own self, dearie. And I wouldn't say it to thee if it hadn't been worriting me for some merciful long while. And what's more I wouldn't say it, if I didn't know what you and your Jim are to one another. 'More than brothers,' is what the whole village do say of ye!"

"Go on — go on — Mrs. Fringe!" cried Luke. "That curst signal's down, and I can hear the train."

"There be other trains than wot run on them irons," pronounced Mrs. Fringe sententiously, "and

if you aren't careful, one such God Almighty's train will run over that brother of yours, sooner or later."

Luke looked apprehensively up the long converging steel track. The gloom of the day and the ominous tone of his old gossip affected him very unpleasantly. He began to wish that there was not a deep muddy pond under the Hullaway elms.

"What on earth do you mean?" he cried, adding impatiently, "Oh damn that train!" as a cloud of smoke made itself visible in the distance.

"Only this, dearie," said the woman picking up her basket, "only this. If you listen to me you'd sooner dig your own grave than have words with brother. Brother be not one wot can stand these fimble-fambles same as you and I. I know wot I do say, cos I was privileged, under Almighty God, to see the end of your dear mother."

"I know — I know —" cried the young man, "but what do you mean?"

Mrs. Fringe thrust her arm through the handle of her basket and turned to meet the incoming train.

" 'Twas when I lived with my dear husband down at Willow-Grove," she said. " 'Twas a stone's throw there from where you and Jim were born. I always feared he would go, same as she went, sooner or later. He talks like her. He looks like her. He treats a person in the way she treated a person, poor moon-struck darling! 'Twas all along of your father. She couldn't bide him along-side of her in the last days. And he knew it as well as you and I know it. But do 'ee think it made any difference to him? Not a bit, dearie! Not one little bit!"

The train had now stopped, and with various

humorous observations, addressed to porters and passengers indiscriminately, Mrs. Fringe took her place in a carriage.

Heedless of being overheard, Luke addressed her through the window of the compartment. "But what about James? What were you saying about James?"

"'Tis too long a tale to tell 'ee, dearie," murmured the woman breathlessly. "There be need now of all my blessed wits to do business for the Reverend." There, look at that!" She waved at him a crumpled piece of paper. "Beyond all thinking I've got to fetch him books from Slitly's. Books, by the Lord! As if he hadn't too many of the darned things for his poor brain already!"

The engine emitted a portentious puff of smoke, and the train began to move. Luke walked by the side of his friend's window, his hand on the sash.

"You think it is inadvisable to thwart my brother, then," he said, "in any way at all. You think I must humour him. You are afraid if I don't —" His walk was of necessity quickened into a run.

"It's a long story, dearie, a long story. But I had the privilege under God Almighty of knowing your blessed mother when she was called, and I tell you it makes my heart ache to see James going along the same road as —"

Her voice was extinguished by the noise of wheels and steam. Luke, exhausted, was compelled to relax his hold. The rest of the carriages passed him with accumulated speed and he watched the train disappear. In his excitement he had advanced far beyond the limits of the platform. He found himself

standing in a clump of yellow rag-wort, just behind his own stone-cutter's shed.

He gazed up the track, along which the tantalizing lady had been so inexorably snatched away. The rails had a dull whitish glitter but their look was bleak and grim. They suggested, in their narrow merciless perspective, cutting the pastures in twain, the presence of some remorseless mechanical Will carving its purpose, blindly and pitilessly, out of the innocent waywardness of thoughtless living things.

An immense and indefinable foreboding passed, like the insertion of a cold, dead finger, through the heart of the young man. Fantastic and terrible images pursued one another through his agitated brain. He saw his brother lying submerged in Hullaway Pond, while a group of frightened children stood, in white pinafores, stared at him with gaping mouths. He saw himself arriving upon this scene. He even went so far as to repeat to himself the sort of cry that such a sight might naturally draw from his lips, his insatiable dramatic sense making use, in this way, of his very panic, to project its irrepressible puppet-show. His brother's words, "Young man, I will never forgive you for this," rose luridly before him. He saw them written along the edge of a certain dark cloud which hung threateningly over the Hullaway horizon. He felt precisely what he would feel when he saw them — luminously phosphorescent — in the indescribable mud and greenish weeds that surrounded his brother's dead face. A sickening sense of loss and emptiness went shivering through him. He felt as though nothing in the

world was of the least importance except the life of James Andersen.

With hurried steps he re-crossed the line, re-passed the turn-stile, and began following the direction taken by his brother just two hours before. Never had the road to Hullaway seemed so long!

Half-way there, where the road took a devious turn, he left it, and entering the fields again, followed a vaguely outlined foot-path. This also betraying him, or seeming to betray him, by its departure from the straight route, he began crossing the meadows with feverish directness, climbing over hedges and ditches with the desperate pre-occupation of one pursued by invisible pursuers. The expression upon his face, as he hurried forward in this manner, was the expression of a man who has everything he values at stake. A casual acquaintance would never have supposed that the equable countenance of Luke Andersen had the power to look so haggard, so drawn, so troubled. He struck the road again less than half a mile from his destination. Why he was so certain that Hullaway was the spot he sought, he could hardly have explained. It was, however, one of his own favourite walks on rainless evenings and Sunday afternoons, and quite recently he had several times persuaded his brother to accompany him. He himself was wont to haunt the place and its surroundings, because of the fact that, about a mile to the west of it, there stood an isolated glove-factory to which certain of the Nevilton girls were accustomed to make their way across the field-paths.

Hullaway village was a very small place, considerably more remote from the world than Nevilton, and

attainable only by narrow lanes. The centre of it was the great muddy stagnant pond which now so dominated Luke's alarmed imagination. Near the pond was a group of elms, of immense antiquity, — many of them mere stumps of trees, — but all of them possessed of wide-spreading prominent roots, and deeply indented hollow trunks worn as smooth as ancient household furniture, by the constant fumbling and scrambling of generations of Hullaway children.

The only other objects of interest in the place, were a small, unobtrusive church, built, like everything else in the neighborhood, of Leonian stone, and an ancient farm-house surrounded by a high manorial wall. Beneath one of the Hullaway Elms stood an interesting relic of a ruder age, in the shape of some well-worn stocks, now as pleasant a seat for rural gossips as they were formerly an unpleasant pillory for rural malefactors.

As Luke Andersen approached this familiar spot he observed with a certain vague irritation the well-known figure of one of his most recent Nevilton enchantresses. The girl was no other, in fact, than that shy companion of Annie Bristow who had been amusing herself with them in the Fountain Square on the occasion of Mr. Clavering's ill-timed intervention. At this moment she was sauntering negligently along, on a high-raised path of narrow paved flag-stones, such paths being a peculiarity of Hullaway, due to the prevalence of heavy autumn floods.

The girl was evidently bound for the glove-factory, for she swung a large bundle as she walked, resting it idly every now and then, on any available wall or

rail or close-cut hedge, along which she passed. She was an attractive figure, tall, willowy, and lithe, and she walked in that lingering, swaying voluptuous manner which gives to the movements of maidens of her type a sort of provocative challenge. Luke, advancing along the road behind her, caught himself admiring, in spite of his intense preoccupation, the alluring swing of her walk and the captivating lines of her graceful person.

The moment was approaching that he had so fantastically dreaded, the moment of his first glance at Hullaway Great Pond. He was already relieved to see no signs of anything unusual in the air of the place, — but the imaged vision of his brother's drowned body still hovered before him, and that fatal "I'll never forgive you for this!" still rang in his ears.

His mind all this while was working with extraordinary rapidity and he was fully conscious of the grotesque irrelevance of this lapse into the ingrained habit of wanton admiration. Quickly, in a flash of lightning, he reviewed all his amorous adventures and his frivolous philanderings. How empty, how bleak, how impossible, all such pleasures seemed, without the dark stooping figure of this companion of his soul as their taciturn background! He looked at Phyllis Santon with a sudden savage resolution, and made a quaint sort of vow in the depths of his heart.

"I'll never speak to the wench again or look at her again," he said to himself, "if I find Daddy Jim safe and sound, and if he forgives me!"

He hurried past her, almost at a run, and arrived at the centre of Hullaway. There was the Great

Pond, with its low white-washed stone parapet. There were the ancient elm-trees and the stocks. There also were the white-pinafored infants playing in the hollow aperture of the oldest among the trees. But the slimy surface of the water was utterly undisturbed save by two or three assiduous ducks who at intervals plunged beneath it.

He drew an immense sigh of relief and glanced casually round. Phyllis had not failed to perceive him. With a shy little friendly smile she advanced towards him. His vow was already in some danger. He waved her a hasty greeting but did not take her hand.

"You'd better put yourself into the stocks," he said, covering with a smile the brutality of his neglect, "until I come back! I have to find James."

Leaving her standing in mute consternation, he rushed off to the churchyard on the further side of the little common. There was a certain spot here, under the shelter of the Manor wall, where Luke and his brother had spent several delicious afternoons, moralizing upon the quaint epitaphs around them, and smoking cigarettes. Luke felt as if he were almost sure to find James stretched out at length before a certain old tombstone whose queer appeal to the casual intruder had always especially attracted him. Both brothers had a philosophical mania for these sepulchral places, and the Hullaway graveyard was even more congenial to their spirit than the Nevilton one, perhaps because this latter was so dominatingly possessed by their own dead.

Luke entered the enclosure through a wide-open wooden gate and glanced quickly round him. There

was the Manor wall, as mellow and sheltering as ever, even on such a day of clouds. There was their favourite tombstone, with its long inscription to the defunct seignorial house. But of James Andersen there was not the remotest sign.

Where the devil had his angry brother gone? Luke's passionate anxiety began to give place to a certain indignant reaction. Why were people so ridiculous? These volcanic outbursts of ungoverned emotion on trifling occasions were just the things that spoiled the harmony and serenity of life. Where, on earth, could James have slipped off to? He remembered that they had more than once gone together to the King's Arms — the unpretentious Hullaway tavern. It was just within the bounds of possibility that the wanderer, finding their other haunts chill and unappealing, had taken refuge there.

He recrossed the common, waved his hand to Phyllis, who seemed to have taken his speech quite seriously and was patiently seated on the stocks, and made his way hurriedly to the little inn.

Yes —there, ensconced in a corner of the high settle, with a half-finished tankard of ale by his side, was his errant brother.

James rose at once to greet him, showing complete friendliness, and very small surprise. He seemed to have been drinking more than his wont, however, for he immediately sank back again into his corner, and regarded his brother with a queer absent-minded look.

Luke ordered a glass of cider and sat down close to him on the settle.

"I am sorry," he whispered, laying his hand on his brother's knee. "I didn't mean to annoy you. What you said was quite true. I treated Annie very badly. And Ninsy is altogether different. You'll forgive me, won't you, Daddy Jim?"

James Andersen pressed his hand. "It's nothing," he said in rather a thick voice. "It's like everything else, it's nothing. I was a fool. I am still a fool. But it's better to be a fool than to be dead, isn't it? Or am I talking nonsense?"

"As long as you're not angry with me any longer," answered Luke eagerly, "I don't care how you talk!"

"I went to the churchyard — to our old place — you know," went on his brother. "I stayed nearly an hour there — or was it more? Perhaps it was more. I stayed so long, anyway, that I nearly went to sleep. I think I must have gone to sleep!" he added, after a moment's pause.

"I expect you were tired," remarked Luke rather weakly, feeling for some reason or other, a strange sense of disquietude.

"Tired?" exclaimed the recumbent man, "why should I be tired?" He raised himself up with a jerk, and finishing his glass, set it down with meticulous care upon the ground beside him.

Luke noticed, with an uncomfortable sense of something not quite usual in his manner, that every movement he made and every word he spoke seemed the result of a laborious and conscious effort — like the effort of one in incomplete control of his sensory nerves.

"What shall we do now?" said Luke with an air of ease and indifference. "Do you feel like strolling

back to Nevilton, or shall we make a day of it and go on to Roger-Town Ferry and have dinner there?"

James gave vent to a curiously unpleasant laugh. "You go, my dear," he said, "and leave me where I am."

Luke began to feel thoroughly uncomfortable. He once more laid his hand caressingly on his brother's knee. "You have really forgiven me?" he pleaded. "Really and truly?"

James Andersen had again sunk back into a semi-comatose state in his corner. "Forgive?" he muttered, as though he found difficulty in understanding the meaning of the word, "forgive? I tell you it's nothing."

He was silent, and then, in a still more drowsy murmur, he uttered the word "Nothing" three or four times. Soon after this he closed his eyes and relapsed into a deep slumber.

"Better leave 'un as 'un be," remarked the landlord to Luke. "I've had my eye on 'un for this last 'arf hour. 'A do seem mazed-like, looks so. Let 'un bide where 'un be, master. These be wonderful rumbly days for a man's head. 'Taint what 'ee's 'ad, you understand; to my thinking, 'tis these thunder-shocks wot 'ave worrited 'im."

Luke nodded at the man, and standing up surveyed his brother gravely. It certainly looked as if James was settled in his corner for the rest of the morning. Luke wondered if it would be best to let him remain where he was, and sleep off his coma, or to rouse him and try and persuade him to return home. He decided to take the landlord's advice.

"Very well," he said. "I'll just leave him for a

while to recover himself. You'll keep an eye to him, won't you, Mr. Titley? I'll just wander round a bit, and come back. Maybe if he doesn't want to go home to dinner, we'll have a bite of something here with you."

Mr. Titley promised not to let his guest out of his sight. "I know what these thunder-shocks be," he said. "Don't you worry, mister. You'll find 'un wonderful reasonable along of an hour or so. 'Tis the weather wot 'ave him floored 'im. The liquor 'ee's put down wouldn't hurt a cat."

Luke threw an affectionate glance at his brother's reclining figure and went out. The reaction from his exaggerated anxiety left him listless and unnerved. He walked slowly across the green, towards the group of elms.

It was now past noon and the small children who had been loitering under the trees had been carried off to their mid-day meal. The place seemed entirely deserted, except for the voracious ducks in the mud of the Great Pond. He fancied at first that Phyllis Santon had disappeared with the children, and a queer feeling of disappointment descended upon him. He would have liked at least to have had the opportunity of *refusing* himself the pleasure of talking to her! He approached the enormous elm under which stood the stocks. Ah! She was still there then, his little Nevilton acquaintance. He had not seen her sooner, because she was seated on the lowest roots of the tree, her knees against the stocks themselves.

"Hullo, child!" he found himself saying, while his inner consciousness told itself that he would just say

one word to her, so that her feelings should not be hurt, and then stroll off to the churchyard. "Why, you have fixed yourself in the very place where they used to make people sit, when they put them in the stocks!"

"Have I?" said the girl looking up at him without moving. "'Tis curious to think of them days! They do say folks never tasted meat nor butter in them old times. I guess it's better to be living as we be."

Luke's habitual tone of sentimental moralizing had evidently set the fashion among the maids of Nevilton. Girls are incredibly quick at acquiring the mental atmosphere of a philosopher who attracts them. The simple flattery of her adoption of his colour of thought made it still more difficult for Luke to keep his vow to the Spinners of Destiny.

"Yes," he remarked pensively, seating himself on the stocks above her. "It is extraordinary, isn't it, to think how many generations of people, like you and me, have talked to one another here, in fine days and cloudy days, in winter and summer — and the same old pond and the same old elms listening to all they say?"

"Don't say that, Luke dear," protested the girl, with a little apprehensive movement of her shoulders, and a tightened clasp of her hands round her knees. "I don't like to think of that! 'Tis lonesome enough in this place, mid-day, without thinking of them ghost-stories."

"Why do you say ghost-stories?" inquired Luke. "There's nothing ghostly about that dirty old pond and there's nothing ghostly about these hollow trees — not now, any way."

"'Tis what you said about their listening, that seems ghostly-like to me," replied the girl. "I am always like that, you know. Sometimes, down home, I gets a grip of the terrors from staring at old Mr. Pratty's barn. 'Tis funny, isn't it? I suppose I was born along of Christmas. They say children born then are wonderful ones for fancying things."

Luke prodded the ground with his cane and looked at her in silence. Conscious of a certain admiration in his look, for the awkwardness of her pose only enhanced the magnetic charm of her person, she proceeded to remove her hat and lean her head with a wistful abandonment against the rough bark of the tree.

The clouds hung heavily over them, and it seemed that at any moment the rain might descend in torrents; but so far not a drop had fallen. Queer and mysterious emotions passed through Luke's mind.

He felt in some odd way that he was at a turning-point in the tide of his existence. It almost seemed to him as though, silent and unmoving, under the roof of the little inn which he could see from where he sat, his brother was lying in the crisis of some dangerous fever. A movement, or gesture, or word, from himself might precipitate this crisis, in one direction or the other.

The girl crouched at his feet became to him, as he gazed at her, something more than a mere amorous acquaintance. She became a type, a symbol — an incarnation of the formidable writing of that Moving Finger, to which all flesh must bow. Her half-coquettish, half-serious apprehensions, about the

ghostliness of the things that are always *listening*, as the human drama works itself out in their dumb presence, affected him in spite of himself. The village of Hullaway seemed at that moment to have disappeared into space, and he and his companion to be isolated and suspended—remote from all terrestial activities, and yet aware of some confused struggle between invisible antagonists.

From the splashing ducks in the pond who, every now then, so ridiculously turned up their squat tails to the cloudy heavens, his eye wandered to the impenetrable expectancy of the stone path which bordered the muddy edge of the water. With the quick sense of one whose daily occupation was concerned with this particular stone, he began calculating how long that time-worn pavement had remained there, and how many generations of human feet, hurrying or loitering, had passed along it since it was first laid down. What actual men, he wondered, had brought it there, from its resting-place, æons-old in the distant hill, and laid it where it now lay, slab by slab?

From where he sat he could just observe, between a gap in the trees of the Manor-Farm garden, the extreme edge of that Leonian promontory. It seemed to him as though the hill were at that moment being swept by a storm of rain. He shivered a little at the idea of how such a sweeping storm, borne on a northern wind, would invade those bare trenches and unprotected escarpments. He felt glad that his brother had selected Hullaway rather than that particular spot for his angry retreat.

With a sense of relief he turned his eyes once more

to the girl reclining below him in such a charming attitude.

How absurd it was, he thought, to let these vague superstitions overmaster him! Surely it was really an indication of cowardice, in the presence of a hypothetical Fate, to make such fantastic vows as that which he had recently made. It was all part of the atavistic survival in him of that unhappy "conscience," which had done so much to darken the history of the tribes of men. It was like "touching wood" in honour of infernal deities! What was the use of being a philosopher — of being so deeply conscious of the illusive and subjective nature of all these scruples — if, at a crisis, one only fell back into such absurd morbidity? The vow he had registered in his mind an hour before, seemed to him now a piece of grotesque irrelevance — a lapse, a concession to weakness, a reversion to primitive inhibition. If it had been cowardice to make such a vow, it were a still greater cowardice to keep it.

He rose from his seat on the stocks, and began idly lifting up and down the heavy wooden bar which surmounted this queer old pillory. He finally left the thing open and gaping; its semi-circular cavities ready for any offender. Moved by a sudden impulse, the girl leant back still further against the tree, and whimsically raising one of her little feet, inserted it into the aperture. Amused at her companion's interest in this levity, and actuated by a profound girlish instinct to ruffle the situation by some startling caprice, she had no sooner got one ankle into the cavity thus prepared for it, than with a sudden effort she placed the other by its

side, and coyly straightening her skirts with her hands, looked up smiling into Luke's face.

Thus challenged, as it were, by this wilful little would-be malefactor, Luke was mechanically compelled to complete her imprisonment. With a sudden vicious snap he let down the enclosing bar.

She was now completely powerless; for the most drastic laws of balance made it quite impossible that she could release herself. It thus became inevitable that he should slip down on the ground by her side, and begin teasing her, indulging himself in sundry innocent caresses which her helpless position made it difficult to resist.

It was not long, however, before Phyllis, fearful of the appearance upon the scene of some of Hullaway's inhabitants, implored him to release her.

Luke rose and with his hand upon the bar contemplated smilingly his fair prisoner.

"Please be quick!" the girl cried impatiently. "I'm getting so stiff."

"Shall I, or shan't I?" said Luke provokingly.

The corner of the girl's mouth fell and her underlip quivered. It only needed a moment's further delay to reduce her to tears.

At that moment two interruptions occurred simultaneously. From the door of the King's Arms emerged the landlord, and began making vehement signals to Luke; while from the corner of the road to Nevilton appeared the figures of two young ladies, walking briskly towards them, absorbed in earnest conversation. These simultaneous events were observed in varying ratio by the captive and her captor. Luke was vaguely conscious of the two ladies

and profoundly agitated by the appearance of the landlord. Phyllis was vaguely conscious of the landlord and was profoundly agitated by the appearance of the ladies. The young stone-carver gave a quick thoughtless jerk to the bar; and without waiting to see the result, rushed off towards the inn. The heavy block of wood, impelled by the impetus he had given it, swung upwards, until it almost reached the perpendicular. Then it descended with a crash. The girl had just time to withdraw one of her ankles. The other was imprisoned as hopelessly as before.

Phyllis was overwhelmed with shame and embarrassment. She had in a moment recognized Gladys, and she felt as those Apocalyptic unfortunates in Holy Scripture are reported as feeling when they call upon the hills to cover them.

It had happened that Ralph Dangelis had been compelled to pay a flying visit to London on business connected with his proposed marriage. The two cousins, preoccupied, each of them, with their separate anxieties, had wandered thus far from home to escape the teasing fussiness of Mrs. Romer, who with her preparations for the double wedding gave neither of them any peace.

They approached quite near to the group of elms before either of them observed the unfortunate Phyllis.

"Why!" cried Gladys suddenly to her companion. "There's somebody in the stocks!"

She went forward hastily, followed at a slower pace by the Italian. Poor Phyllis, her bundle by her side, and her cheeks tear-stained, presented a woeful enough appearance. Her first inclination was

to hide her face in her hands; but making a brave effort, she turned her head towards the new-comers with a gasping little laugh.

"I put my foot in here for a joke," she stammered, "and it got caught. Please let me out, Miss Romer."

Gladys came quite near and laid her gloved hand upon the wooden bar.

"It just lifts up, Miss," pleaded Phyllis, with tears in her voice. "It isn't at all heavy."

Gladys stared at her with a growing sense of interest. The girl's embarrassment under her scrutiny awoke her Romer malice.

"I really don't know that I want to let you out in such a hurry," she said. "If it's a game you are playing, it would be a pity to spoil it. Who put you in? You must tell me that, before I set you free! You couldn't have done it yourself."

By this time Lacrima had arrived on the scene.

The shame-faced Phyllis turned to her. "Please, Miss Traffio, please, lift that thing up! It's quite easy to move."

The Italian at once laid her hands upon the block of wood and struggled to raise it; but Gladys had no difficulty in keeping the bar immoveable.

"What are you doing?" cried the younger girl indignantly. "Take your arm away!"

"She must tell us first who put her where she is," reiterated Miss Romer. "I won't have her let out 'till she tells us that!"

Phyllis looked piteously from one to the other. Then she grew desperate.

"It was Luke Andersen," she whispered.

"What!" cried Gladys. "Luke? Then he's been

out walking with you? Has he? Has he? Has he?"

She repeated these words with such concentrated fury that Phyllis began to cry. But the shock of this information gave Lacrima her chance. Using all her strength she lifted the heavy bar and released the prisoner. Phyllis staggered to her feet and picked up her bundle. Lacrima handed the girl her hat and helped her to brush the dust from her clothes.

"So *you* are Luke's latest fancy, are you?" Gladys said, scowling fiercely at the glove-maker.

The pent-up feelings of the young woman broke forth at once. Moving a step or two away from them and glancing at a group of farm-men who were crossing the green, she gave full scope to her revenge.

"I'm only Annie Bristow's friend," she retorted. "Annie Bristow is going to marry Luke. They are right down mad on one another."

"It's a lie!" cried Gladys, completely forgetting herself and looking as if she could have struck the mocking villager.

"A lie, eh?" returned the other. "Tisn't for me to tell the tale to a young lady, the likes of you. But we be all guessing down in Mr. North's factory, who 'twas that gave Luke the pretty lady-like ring wot he lent to Annie!"

Gladys became livid with anger. "What ring?" she cried. "Why are you talking about a ring?"

"Annie, she stuck it, for devilry, into that hole in Splash-Lane stone. She pushed it in, tight as 'twere a sham diamint. And there it do bide, the lady's pretty ring, all glittery and shiny, at bottom of that there hole! We maids do go to see 'un glinsying

and gleaming. It be the talk of the place, that ring be! Scarce one of the childer but 'as 'ad its try to hook 'un out. But 'tis no good. I guess Annie must have rammed it down with her mother's girt skewer. 'Tis fast in that stone anyway, for all the world to see. Folks, maybe, 'll be coming from Yeoborough, long as a few days be over, to see the lady's ring, wot Annie threw'd away, 'afore she said 'yes' to her young man!"

These final words were positively shouted by the enraged Phyllis, as she tripped away, swinging her bundle triumphantly.

It seemed for a moment as though Gladys meditated a desperate pursuit, and the infliction of physical violence upon her enemy. But Lacrima held her fast by the hand. "For heaven's sake, cousin," she whispered, "let her go. Look at those men watching us!"

Gladys turned; but it was not at the farm-men she looked.

Across the green towards them came the two Andersens, Luke looking nervous and worried, and his brother gesticulating strangely. The girls remained motionless, neither advancing to meet them nor making any attempt to evade them. Gladys seemed to lose her defiant air, and waited their approach, rather with the look of one expecting to be chidden than of one prepared to chide. On all recent occasions this had been her manner, when in the presence of the young stone-carver.

The sight of Lacrima seemed to exercise a magical effect upon James Andersen. He ceased at once his excited talk, and advancing towards her, greeted

her in his normal tone—a tone of almost paternal gentleness.

"It is nearly a quarter to one," said Gladys, addressing both the men. "Lacrima and I'll have all we can do to get back in time for lunch. Let's walk back together!"

Luke looked at his brother who gave him a friendly smile. He also looked sharply at the Hullaway labourers, who were shuffling off towards the barton of the Manor-Farm.

"I don't mind," he said; "though it is a dangerous time of day! But we can go by the fields, and you can leave us at Roandyke Barn."

They moved off along the edge of the pond together.

"It was Lacrima, not I, Luke," said Gladys presently, "who let that girl out."

Luke flicked a clump of dock-weeds with his cane. "It was her own fault," he said carelessly. "I thought I'd opened the thing. I was called away suddenly."

Gladys bowed her head submissively. In the company of the young stone-carver her whole nature seemed to change. A shrewd observer might even have marked a subtle difference in her physical appearance. She appeared to wilt and droop, like a tropical flower transplanted into a northern zone.

They remained all together until they reached the fields. Then Gladys and Luke dropped behind.

"I have something I want to tell you," said the fair girl, as soon as the others were out of hearing. "Something very important."

"I have something to tell you too," answered Luke, "and I think I will tell it first. It is hardly likely that your piece of news can be as serious as mine."

They paused at a stile; and the girl made him take her in his arms and kiss her, before she consented to hear what he had to say.

It would have been noticeable to any observer that in the caresses they exchanged, Luke played the perfunctory, and she the passionate part. She kissed him thirstily, insatiably, with clinging lips that seemed avid of his very soul. When at last they moved on through grass that was still wet with the rain of the night before, Luke drew his hand away from hers, as if to emphasize the seriousness of his words.

"I am terribly anxious, dearest, about James," he said. "We had an absurd quarrel this morning, and he rushed off to Hullaway in a rage. I found him in the inn. He had been drinking, but it was not that which upset him. He had not taken enough to affect him in that way. I am very, very anxious about him. I forget whether I've ever told you about my mother? Her mind — poor darling — was horribly upset before she died. She suffered from more than one distressing mania. And my fear is that James may go the same way.'

Gladys hung her head. In a strange and subtle way she felt as though the responsibility of this new catastrophe rested upon her. Her desperate passion for Luke had so unnerved her, that she had become liable to be victimized by any sort of superstitious apprehension.

"How dreadful!" she whispered, "but he seemed to me perfectly natural just now."

"That was Lacrima's doing," said Luke. "Lacrima is at the bottom of it all. I wish, oh, I wish, she was going to marry James, instead of that uncle of yours."

"Father would never allow that," said Gladys, raising her head. "He is set upon making her take uncle John. It has become a kind of passion with him. Father is funny in these things."

"Still — it might be managed," muttered Luke thoughtfully, "if we carried it through with a high hand. We might arrange it; the world is malleable, after all. If you and I, my dear, put our heads together, Mr. John Goring might whistle for his bride."

"I *hate* Lacrima!" cried Gladys, with a sudden access of her normal spirit.

"I don't care two pence about Lacrima," returned Luke. "It is of James I am thinking."

"But she would be happy with James, and I don't want her to be happy."

"What a little devil you are!" exclaimed the stone-carver, slipping his arm round her waist.

"Yes, I know I am," she answered shamelessly. "I suppose I inherit it from father. He hates people just like that. But I am not a devil with you, Luke, am I? I wish I were!" she added, after a little pause.

"We must think over this business from every point of view," said Luke solemnly. "I cannot help thinking that if you and I resolve to do it, we can twist the fates round, somehow or another. I

am sure Lacrima could save James if she liked. If you could only have seen the difference between what he was when I was called back to him just now, and what he became as soon as he set eyes upon her, you would know what I mean. He is mad about her, and if he doesn't get her, he'll go really mad. He *was* a madman just now. He nearly frightened that fool Titley into a fit."

"I don't *want* Lacrima to marry James," burst out Gladys. Luke in a moment drew his arm away, and quickened his pace.

"As you please," he said. "But I can promise you this, my friend, that if anything does happen to my brother, it'll be the end of everything between *us*."

"Why — what — how can you say such dreadful things?" stammered the girl.

Luke airily swung his stick. "It all rests with you, child. Though *we* can't marry, there's no reason why we shouldn't go on seeing each other, as we do now, forever and ever, — as long as you help me in this affair. But if you're going to sulk and talk this nonsense about 'hating' — it is probable that it will be a case of good-bye!"

The fair girl's face was distorted by a spasmodic convulsion of conflicting emotions. She bit her lip and hung her head. Presently she looked up again and flung her arms round his neck. "I'll do anything you ask me, Luke, anything, as long as you don't turn against me."

They walked along for some time in silence, hand in hand, taking care not to lose sight of their two companions who seemed as engrossed as themselves

in one another's society. James Andersen was showing sufficient discretion in avoiding the more frequented foot-paths.

"Luke", began the girl at last, "did you really give my ring to Annie Santon?"

"Luke's brow clouded in a moment. "Damn your ring!" he cried harshly. "I've got other things to think about now than your confounded rings. When people give me presents of that kind," he added "I take for granted I can do what I like with them."

Gladys trembled and looked pitfully into his face.

"But that girl said," she murmured — "that factory girl, I mean — that it had been lost in some way; hidden, she said, in some hole in a stone. I can't believe that you would let me be made a laughing-stock of, Luke dear?"

"Oh, don't worry me about that," replied the stone-carver. "Maybe it is so, maybe it isn't so; anyway it doesn't matter a hang."

"She said too," pleaded Gladys in a hesitating voice, "that you and Annie were going to be married."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Luke, fumbling with some tightly tied hurdles that barred their way; "so she said that, did she? She *must* have had her knife into you, our little Phyllis. Well, and what's to stop me if I did decide to marry Annie?"

Gladys gasped and looked at him with a drawn and haggard face. Her beauty was of the kind that required the flush of buoyant spirits to illuminate it. The more her heart ached, the less attractive she became. She was anything but beautiful now; and,

as he looked at her, Luke noticed for the first time, how low her hair grew upon her forehead.

"You wouldn't think of doing that?" she whispered, in a tone of supplication. He laughed lightly and lifting up her chin made as though he were going to kiss her, but drew back without doing so.

"Are you going to be good," he said, "and help me to get Lacrima for James?"

She threw her arms round him. "I'll do anything you like — anything," she repeated, "if you'll only let me love you!"

While this conversation was proceeding between these two, a not less interesting clash of divergent emotions was occurring between their friends. The Italian may easily be pardoned if she never for one second dreamed of the agitation in her companion's mind that had so frightened Luke. James' manner was in no way different from usual, and though he expressed his feelings in a more unreserved fashion than he had ever done before, Lacrima had been for many weeks expecting some such outbreak.

"Don't be angry with me," he was saying, as he strode by her side. "I had meant never to have told you of this. I had meant to let it die with me, without your ever knowing, but somehow — today — I could not help it."

He had confessed to her point blank, and in simple, unbroken words, the secret of his heart, and Lacrima had for some moments walked along with head averted making no response.

It would not be true to say that this revelation surprised her. It would be completely untrue to say it offended her. It did not even enter her mind that

it might have been kinder to have been less friendly, less responsive, than she had been, to this queer taciturn admirer. But circumstances had really given her very little choice in the matter. She had been, as it were, flung perforce upon his society, and she had accepted, as a providential qualification of her loneliness, the fact that he was attracted towards her rather than repelled by her.

It is quite possible that had he remained untouched by the evasive appeal of her timid grace; had he, for instance, remained a provocative and impenetrable mystery at her side, she might have been led to share his feelings. But, unluckily for poor Andersen, the very fact that his feelings had been disclosed only too clearly, militated hopelessly against such an event. He was no remote, shadowy, romantic possibility to her — a closed casket of wonders, difficult and dangerous to open. He was simply a passionate and assiduous lover. The fact that he *could* love her, lowered him a little in Lacrima's esteem. True to her Pariah instincts she felt that such passion was a sign of weakness in him; and if she did not actually despise him for it, it materially lessened the interest she took in the workings of his mind. Maurice Quincunx drew her to him for the very reason that he was so sexless, so cold, so wayward, so full of whimsical caprices. Maurice, a Pariah himself, excited at the same time her maternal tenderness and her imaginative affection. If she did not feel the passion for him that she might have felt for Andersen, had Andersen remained inacessible; that was only because there was something in Maurice's peculiar egoism which chilled such feelings at their root.

Another almost equally effective cause of her lack of response to the stone-carver's emotion was the cynical and world-deep weariness that had fallen upon her, since this dreadful marriage with Goring had become a settled event. Face to face with this, she felt as though nothing mattered very much, and as though any feeling she herself might excite in another person must needs be like the passing of a shadow across a mirror — something vague, unreal, insubstantial — something removed to a remote distance, like the voice of a person at the end of a long tunnel, or as the dream of someone who is himself a figure in a dream. If anyone, she felt, broke into the enchanted circle that surrounded her, it was as if they sought to make overtures to a person dead and buried.

It was almost with the coldness and detachment of the dead that she now answered him, and her voice went sighing across the wet fields with a desolation that would have struck a more normal mind than Andersen's as the incarnation of tragedy. He was himself, however, strung up to such a tragic note, that the despair in her tone affected him less than it would have affected another.

"I have come to feel," said she, "that I have no heart, and I feel as though this country of yours had no heart. It ought to be always cloudy and dark in this place. Sunshine here is a kind of bitter mockery."

"You do not know—you do not know what you say," cried the poor stone-carver, quickening his pace in his excitement so that it became difficult for her to keep up with him. "I have loved you, since I

first saw you—that day—down at our works—when the hawthorn was out. *My* heart at any rate is deep enough, deep enough to be hurt more than you would believe, Lacrima. Oh, if things were only different! If you could only bring yourself to care for me a little—just a little! Lacrima, listen to me."

He stopped abruptly in the middle of a field and made her turn and face him. He laid his hand solemnly and imploringly upon her wrist. "Why need you put yourself under this frightful yoke? I know something of what you have had to go through. I know something, though it may be only a little, of what this horrible marriage means to you. Lacrima, for your own sake—as well as mine—for the sake of everyone who has ever cared for you—don't let them drag you into this atrocious trap.

"Trust me, give yourself boldly into my care. Let's go away together and try our fortune in some new place! All places are not like Nevilton. I am a strong man, I know my trade, I could earn money easily to keep us both. Lacrima, don't turn away, don't look so helpless! After all, things might be worse, you might be already married to that man, and be buried alive forever! It is not yet too late. You are still free. I beg and implore you, by everything you hold sacred, to stop and escape before it is too late. It doesn't matter that you don't love me now. As long as you don't utterly hate me all can be put right. I don't ask you to return what I feel for you. I won't ask it if you agree to marry me. I'll make any contract with you you please, and swear any vow. I won't come near you when we are together. We can live under one roof as brother

and sister. The wedding-ring will be nothing between us. It will only protect you from the rest of the world. I won't interfere with your life at all, when once I have freed you from this devil's hole. It will only be a marriage in form, in name; everything else will be just as you please. I will obey your least wish, your least fancy. If you want to go back to your own country and to go alone, I will save up money enough to make that possible. In fact, I have now got money enough to pay your journey and I would send out more to you. Lacrima, let me help you to break away from all this. You must, Lacrima, you must and you shall! If you prefer it, we needn't ever be married. I don't want to take advantage of you. I'll give you every penny I have and help you out of the country and then send you more as I earn it. It is madness, this devilish marriage they are driving you into. It is madness and folly to submit to it. It is monstrous. It is ridiculous. You are free to go, they have no hold upon you. Lacrima, Lacrima! why are you so cruel to yourself, to me, to everyone who cares for you?"

He drew breath at last, but continued to clutch her wrist with a trembling hand, glancing anxiously, as he waited, at the lessening distance that separated them from the others.

Lacrima looked at him with a pale troubled face, but her large eyes were full of tears and when she spoke her voice quivered.

"I was wrong, my friend, to say that none of you here had any heart. Your heart is large and noble. I shall never—never forget what you have now said

to me. But James—but James, dear," and her voice shook still more, "I cannot, I cannot do it. There are more reasons than I can explain to you, why this thing must happen. It *has* to happen, and we must bow our heads and submit. After all, life is not very long, or very happy, at the best. Probably," —and she smiled a sad little smile,—"I should disappoint you frightfully if we did go together. I am not such a nice person as you suppose. I have queer moods—oh, such strange, strange moods!—and I know for certain that I should not make you happy.

"Shall I tell you a horrible secret, James?" Here her voice sank into a curious whisper and she laughed a low distressing laugh. "I have really got the soul, the *soul* I say, not the nerves or sense, of a girl who has lost everything,—I wish I could make you understand—who has lost self-respect and everything,—I have thought myself into this state. I don't care now—I really don't—*what* happens to me. James, dear—you wouldn't want to marry a person like that, a person who feels herself already dead and buried? Yes, and worse than dead! A person who has lost all pity, all feeling, even for herself. A person who is past even caring for the difference between right and wrong! You wouldn't want to be kind to a person like that, James, would you?"

She stopped and gazed into his face, smiling a woeful little smile. Andersen mechanically noticed that their companions had observed their long pause, and had delayed to advance, resting beneath the shelter of a wind-tossed ash-tree. The stone-carver began to realize the extraordinary and terrible loneliness of every human soul. Here he was, face to face

with the one being of all beings whose least look or word thrilled him with intolerable excitement, and yet he could not as much as touch the outer margin of her real consciousness.

He had not the least idea, even at that fatal moment, what her inner spirit was feeling; what thoughts, what sensations, were passing through her soul. Nor could he ever have. They might stand together thus, isolated from all the world, through an eternity of physical contact, and he would never attain such knowledge. She would always remain aloof, mysterious, evasive. He resolved that at all events as far as he himself was concerned, there should be no barrier between them. He would lay open to her the deepest recesses of his heart.

He began a hurried incoherent history of his passion, of its growth, its subtleties, its intensity. He tried to make her realize what she had become for him, how she filled every hour of every day with her image. He explained to her how clearly and fully he understood the difficulty, the impossibility, of his ever bringing her to care for him as he cared for her.

He even went so far as to allude to Mr. Quincunx, and implored her to believe that he would be well content if she would let him earn money enough to support both her and Maurice, either in Nevilton or elsewhere, if it would cut the tragic knot of her fate to join her destiny to that of the forlorn recluse.

It almost seemed as though this final stroke of self-abnegation excited more eloquence in him than all the rest. He begged and conjured her to cut boldly loose from the Romer bonds, and marry her

queer friend, if he, rather than any other, were the choice she made. His language became so vehement, his tone so impassioned and exalted, that the girl began to look apprehensively at him. Even this apprehension, however, was a thing strangely removed from reality. His reckless words rose and fell upon the air and mixed with the rising wind as if they were words remembered from some previous existence. The man's whole figure, his gaunt frame, his stooping shoulders, his long arms and lean fingers, seemed to her like something only half-tangible, something felt and seen through a dim medium of obscuring mist.

Lacrima felt vaguely as though all this were happening to someone else, to someone she had read about in a book, or had known in remote childhood. The over-hanging clouds, the damp grass, the distant ash-tree with the forms of their friends beneath it, all these things seemed to group themselves in her mind, as if answering to some strange dramatic story, which was not the story of her life at all, but of some other harassed and troubled spirit.

In the depths of her mind she shrank away half-frightened and half-indifferent from this man's impassioned pleading and heroic proposals. The humorously cynical image of the hermit of Dead Man's Lane crossed her mental vision as a sort of wavering Pharos light in the dreamy twilight of her consciousness. How well she knew with what goblin-like quiver of his nostrils, with what sardonic gleam of his eyes, he would have listened to his rival's exalted rhetoric.

In some strange way she felt amost angry with

this bolder, less cautious lover, for being what her poor nervous Maurice never could be. She caught herself shuddering at the thought of the drastic effort, the stern focussing of will-power which the acceptance of any one of his daring suggestions would imply. Perhaps, who can say, there had come to be a sort of voluptuous pleasure in thus lying back upon her destiny and letting herself be carried forward, at the caprice of other wills than her own.

Mingled with these other complex reactions, there was borne in upon her, as she listened to him, a queer sense of the absolute unimportance of the whole matter. The long strain upon her nerves, of her sojourn in Nevilton House, had left her physically so weary that she lacked the life-energy to supply the life-illusion. The ardour and passion of Andersen's suggestions seemed, for all their dramatic pathos, to belong to a world she had left — a world from which she had risen or sunk so completely, that all return was impossible. Her nature was so hopelessly the true Pariah-nature, that the idea of the effort implied in any struggle to escape her doom, seemed worse than the doom itself.

This inhibition of any movement of effective resistance in the Pariah-type is the thing that normal temperaments find most difficult of all to understand. It would seem almost incredible to a healthy minded person that Lacrima should deliberately let herself be driven into such a fate without some last desperate struggle. Those who find it so, however, under-estimate that curious passion of submission from which these victims of circumstance suffer, a passion of submission which is itself, in a profoundly

subtle way, a sort of narcotic or drug to the wretchedness they pass through.

"I cannot do it," she repeated in a low tired voice, "though I think it's generous, beyond description, what you want to do for me. But I cannot do it. It's difficult somehow to tell you why, James dear; there are certain things that are hard to say, even to people that we love as much as I love you. For I do love you, in spite of everything. I hope you realize that. And I know that you have a deep noble heart."

She looked at him with wistful and appealing tenderness, and let her little fingers slip into his feverish hand.

When she said the words, "I do love you," a shivering ecstasy shot through the stone-carver's veins, followed by a ghastly chilliness, like the hand of death, as he grasped their complete meaning. The most devastating tone, perhaps, of all, for an impassioned lover to hear, is that particular tone of calm tender affection. It has the power of closing up vistas of hope more effectively than the expression of the most vigorous repulsion. There was a ring of weary finality in her voice that echoed through his mind, like the tread of coffin-bearers through a darkened passage. Things had reached their hopeless point, and the two were standing mute and silent, in the attitude of persons taking a final farewell of one another, when a noisy group of village maids, on their dilatory road to the glove-factory, made their voices audible from the further side of the nearest hedge.

They both turned instantaneously to see how this

danger of discovery affected their friends, and neither of them was surprised to note that the younger Andersen had left his companion and was strolling casually in the direction of the voices. As soon as he saw that they had observed this manœuvre he began beckoning to James.

"We'd better separate, my friend," whispered Lacrima hastily. "I'll go back to Gladys. She and I must take the lane way and you and Luke the path by the barn. We'll meet again before — before anything happens."

They separated accordingly and as the two girls passed through the gate that led into the Nevilton road, they could distinctly hear, across the fields, the ringing laughter of the high-spirited glove-makers as they chaffed and rallied the two stone-carvers through the thick bramble hedge which intervened between them.

CHAPTER XVII

SAGITTARIUS

THE summer of the year whose events, in so far as they affected a certain little group of Nevilton people we are attempting to describe, seemed, to all concerned, to pass more and more rapidly, as the days began again to shorten. July gave place to August, and Mr. Goring's men were already at work upon the wheat-harvest. In the hedges appeared all those peculiar signals of the culmination of the season's glory, which are, by one of nature's most emphatic ironies, the signals also of its imminent decline.

Old-man's-beard, for instance, hung its feathery clusters on every bush; and, in shadier places, white and black briony twined their decorative leaves and delicate flowers. The blossom of the blackberry bushes was already giving place to unripe fruit, and the berries of traveller's-joy were beginning to turn red. Hips and haws still remained in that vague colourless state which renders them indistinguishable to all eyes save those of the birds, but the juicy clusters of the common night-shade — "green grapes of Proserpine" — greeted the wanderer with their poisonous Circe-like attraction, from their thrones of dog-wood and maple, and whispered of the autumn's approach. In dry deserted places the scarlet splendour of poppies was rapidly yielding ground to all

those queer herbal plants, purplish or whitish in hue—the wild hyssop, or marjoram, being the most noticeable of them—which more than anything else denote the coming on of the equinox. From dusty heaps of rubbish the aromatic daisy-like camomile gave forth its pungent fragrance, and in damper spots the tall purple heads of hemp-agrimony flouted the dying valerian.

An appropriate date at the end of the month had been fixed for the episcopal visit to Nevilton; and the candidates for confirmation were already beginning, according to their various natures and temperaments, to experience that excited anticipation, which, even in the dullest intelligence, such an event arouses.

The interesting ceremony of Gladys Romer's baptism had been fixed for a week earlier than this, a fanciful sentiment in the agitated mind of Mr. Clavering having led to the selection of this particular day on the strange ground of its exact coincidence with the anniversary of a certain famous saint.

The marriage of Gladys with Dangelis, and of Lacrima with John Goring, was to take place early in September, Mrs. Romer having stipulated for reasons of domestic economy that the two events should be simultaneous.

Another project of some importance to at least three persons in Nevilton, was now, as one might say, in the air; though this was by no means a matter of public knowledge. I refer to Vennie Seldom's fixed resolution to be received into the Catholic Church and to become a nun.

Ever since her encounter in the village street with the loquacious Mr. Wone, Vennie had been oppressed

by an invincible distaste for the things and people that surrounded her. Her longing to give the world the slip and devote herself completely to the religious life had been incalculably deepened by her disgust at what she considered the blasphemous introduction of the Holy Name into the Christian Candidate's political canvassing. The arguments of Mr. Taxater and the conventional anglicanism of her mother, were, compared with this, only mild incentives to the step she meditated. The whole fabric of her piety and her taste had been shocked to their foundations by the unctuous complacency of Mr. Romer's evangelical rival.

Vennie felt, as she stood aside, in her retired routine, and watched the political struggle sway to and fro in the village, as though the champions of both causes were odiously and repulsively in the wrong. The sly conservatism of the quarry-owner becoming, since the settlement of the strike, almost fulsome in its flattery of the working classes, struck her as the most unscrupulous bid for power that she had ever encountered; and when, combined with his new pose as the ideal employer and landlord, Mr. Romer introduced the imperial note, and talked lavishly of the economic benefits of the Empire, Vennie felt as though all that was beautiful and sacred in her feeling for the country of her birth, was blighted and poisoned at the root.

But Mr. Wone's attitude of mind struck her as even more revolting. The quarry-owner was at least frankly and flagrantly cynical. He made no attempt—unless Gladys' confirmation was to be regarded as such—to conciliate religious sentiment. He

never went to church, and in private conversation he expressed his atheistic opinions with humorous and careless shamelessness. But Mr. Wone's intermingling of Protestant unction with political chicanery struck the passionate soul of the young girl as something very nearly approaching the "unpardonable sin." Her incisive intelligence, fortified of late by conversations with Mr. Taxater, revolted, too, against the vague ethical verbiage and loose democratic sentiment with which Mr. Wone garnished his lightest talk. Since Philip's release from prison and his reappearance in the village, she had taken the opportunity of having several interviews with the Christian Candidate's son, and these interviews, though they saddened and perplexed her, increased her respect for the young man in proportion as they diminished it for his father. With true feminine instinct Vennie found the anarchist more attractive than the socialist, and the atheist less repugnant than the missionary.

One afternoon, towards the end of the first week in August, Vennie persuaded Mr. Taxater to accompany her on a long walk. They made their way through the wood which separates the fields around Nevilton Mount from the fields around Leo's Hill. Issuing from this wood, along the path followed by every visitor to the hill who wishes to avoid its steeper slopes, they strolled leisurely between the patches of high bracken-fern and looked down upon the little church of Athelston.

Athleston was a long, rambling village, encircling the northern end of the Leonian promontory and offering shelter, in many small cottages all heavily

built of the same material, to those of the workmen in the quarries who were not domiciled in Nevilton.

"It would be rather nice," said Vennie to the theologian, "if it wouldn't spoil our walk, to go and look at that carving in the porch, down there. They say it has been cleaned lately, and the figures show up more clearly."

The papal champion gravely surveyed the outline of the little cruciform church, as it shimmered, warm and mellow, in the misty sunshine at their feet.

"Yes, I know," he remarked. "I met our friend Andersen there the other day. He told me he had been doing the work quite alone. He said it was one of the most interesting things he had ever done. By the way, I am confident that that rumour we heard, of his getting unsettled in his mind, is absolutely untrue. I have never found him more sensible — you know how silent he is as a rule? When I met him he was quite eloquent on the subject of mediæval carving."

Vennie looked down and smiled — a sad little smile. "I'm afraid," she said; "that his talking so freely is not quite a good sign. But do let's go. I have never looked at those queer figures with anyone but my mother; and you know the way she has of making everything seem as if it were an ornament on her own mantelpiece."

They began descending the hill, Mr. Taxater displaying more agility than might have been expected of him, as they scrambled down between furze-bushes, rabbit-holes, and beds of yellow trefoil.

"How dreadfully I shall miss you, dear child," he

said. "No one could accuse me of selfishness in furthering your wish for the religious life. Half the pleasant discoveries I've made in this charming country have been due to you."

The young girl turned and regarded him affectionately. "You have been more than a father to me," she murmured.

"Ah, Vennie, Vennie! he protested, "you mustn't talk like that. After all, the greatest discovery we have made, is the discovery of your calling for religion. I have much to be thankful for. It is not often that I have been permitted such a privilege. If we had not been thrown together, who knows but that the influence of our good Clavering ——"

Vennie blushed scarlet at the mention of the priest's name, and to hide her confusion, buried her head in a great clump of rag-wort, pressing its yellow clusters vehemently against her cheeks, with agitated trembling hands.

When she lifted up her face, the fair hair under her hat was sprinkled with dewy moisture. "The turn of the year has come," she said. "There's mist on everything today." She smiled, with a quick embarrassed glance at her companion.

"The turn of the year has come," repeated the champion of the papacy.

They descended the slope of yet another field, and then paused again, leaning upon a gate.

"Have you ever thought how strange it is," remarked the girl, as they turned to survey the scene around them, "that those two hills should still, in a way, represent the struggle between good and evil? I always wish that my ancestors had built a

chapel on Nevilton Mount instead of that silly little tower."

The theologian fixed his eyes on the two eminences which, from the point where they stood, showed so emphatically against the smouldering August sky.

"Why do you call Leo's Hill evil?" he asked.

Vennie frowned. "I always have felt like that about it," she answered. "It's an odd fancy I've got. I can't quite explain it. Perhaps it's because I know something of the hard life of the quarry-men. Perhaps it's because of Mr. Romer. I really can't tell you. But that's the feeling I have!"

"Our worthy Mr. Wone would thank you, if you lent him your idea for use in his speeches," remarked the theologian with a chuckle.

"That's just it!" cried Vennie. "It teases me, more than I can say, that the cause of the poor should be in his hands. I can't associate *him* with anything good or sacred. His being the one to oppose Mr. Romer makes me feel as though God had left us completely, left us at the mercy of the false prophets!"

"Child, child!" expostulated Mr. Taxater — "*Custodit Dominus animas sanctorum suorum; de manu peccatoris liberabit eos.*"

"But it is so strange," continued Vennie. "It is one of the things I cannot understand. Why should God have to use other means than those His church offers to defeat the designs of wicked people? I wish miracles happened more often! Sometimes I dream of them happening. I dreamt the other night that an angel, with a great silver sword, stood on the top

of Nevilton Mount, and cried aloud to all the dead in the churchyard. Why can't God send real angels to fight His battles, instead of using wolves in sheep's clothing like that wretched Mr. Wone?"

The champion of the papacy smiled. "You are too hard on our poor Candidate, Vennie. There's more of the sheep than the wolf about our worthy Wone, after all. But you touch upon a large question, my dear; a large question. That great circle, whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere, as St. Thomas says, must needs include many ways to the fulfilment of His ends, which are mysterious to us. God is sometimes pleased to use the machinations of the most evil men, even their sensual passions, and their abominable vices, to bring about the fulfilment of His will. And we, dear child," he added after a pause, "must follow God's methods. That is why the church has always condemned as a dangerous heresy that Tolstoyan doctrine of submission to evil. We must never submit to evil! Our duty is to use against it every weapon the world offers. Weapons that in themselves are unholy, become holy — nay! even sacred — when used in the cause of God and His church."

Vennie remained puzzled and silent. She felt a vague, remote dissatisfaction with her friend's argument; but she found it difficult to answer. She glanced sadly up at the cone-shaped mount above them, and wished that in place of that heathen-looking tower, she could see her angel with the silver sword.

"It is all very confusing," she murmured at last, "and I shall be glad when I am out of it."

The theologian laid his hand — the hand that ought to have belonged to a prince of the church — upon his companion's.

"You will be out of it soon, child," he said, "and then you will help us by your prayers. We who are the temporal monks of the great struggle are bound to soil our hands in the dust of the arena. But your prayers, and the prayers of many like you, cleanse them continually from such unhappy stains."

Even at the moment he was uttering these profound words, Mr. Taxater was wondering in his heart how far his friend's inclination to a convent depended upon an impulse much more natural and feminine than the desire to avoid the Mr. Romers and Mr. Wones of this poor world. He made a second rather brutal experiment.

"We must renounce," he said, "all these plausible poetic attempts to be wiser than God's Holy Church. That is one of the faults into which our worthy Clavering falls."

Once more the tell-tale scarlet rushed into the cheeks of Nevilton's little nun.

"Yes," she answered, stooping to pluck a spray of wild basil, "I know."

They opened the gate, and very soon found themselves at the entrance to Athelston church. Late summer flowers, planted in rows on each side of the path, met them with a ravishing fragrance. Stocks and sweet-williams grew freely among the graves; and tall standard roses held up the wealth of their second blossoming, like chalices full of red and white wine. Heavy-winged brown butterflies fluttered over the grass, like the earth-drawn

spirits, Vennie thought, of such among the dead as were loath to leave the scene of their earthly pleasures. Mounted upon a step-ladder in the porch was the figure of James Andersen, absorbed in removing the moss and lichen from the carving in the central arch.

He came down at once when he perceived their approach. "Look!" he said, with a wave of his hand, "you can see what it is now."

Obedient to his words they both gazed curiously at the quaint early Norman relief. It represented a centaur, with a drawn bow and arrow, aiming at a retreating lion, which was sneaking off in humorously depicted terror.

"That is King Stephen," said the stone-carver, pointing to the centaur. "And the beast he is aiming at is Queen Maud. Stephen's zodiacal sign was Sagittarius, and the woman's was Leo. Hence the arrow he is aiming."

Vennie's mind, reverting to her fanciful distinction between the two eminences, and woman-like, associating everything she saw with the persons of her own drama, at once began to discern, between the retreating animal and the fair-haired daughter of the owner of Leo's Hill, a queer and grotesque resemblance.

She heaved a deep sigh. What would she not give to see her poor priest-centaur aim such an arrow of triumph at the heart of his insidious temptress!

"I think you have made them stand out wonderfully clear," she said gently. "Hasn't he, Mr. Taxater?"

The stone-carver threw down the instrument he

was using, and folded his arms. His dark, foreign-looking countenance wore a very curious expression.

"I wanted to finish this job," he remarked, in a slow deep voice, "before I turn into stone myself."

"Come, come, my friend," said Mr. Taxater, while Vennie stared in speechless alarm at the carver's face. "You mustn't talk like that! You people get a wrong perspective in things. Remember, this is no longer the Stone Age. The power of stone was broken once for all, when certain women of Palestine found that stone, which we've all heard of, lifted out of its place! Since then it is to wood — the wood out of which His cross was made — not to stone, that we must look."

The carver raised his long arm and pointed in the direction of Leo's Hill. "Twenty years," he said, "have I been working on this stone. I used to despise such work. Then I grew to care for it. Then there came a change. I loved the work! It was the only thing I loved. I loved to feel the stone under my hands, and to watch it yielding to my tools. I think the soul of it must have passed into my soul. It seemed to know me; to respond to me. We became like lovers, the stone and I!" He laughed an uneasy, disconcerting laugh; and went on.

"But that is not all. Another change came. *She* came into my life. I needn't tell you, Miss Seldom, who I mean. You know well enough. These things cannot be hidden. Nothing can be hidden that happens here! She came and was kind to me. She is kind to me still. But they have got hold of her. She can't resist them. Why she can't, I cannot say; but it seems impossible. She talks to me like

a person in a dream. They're going to marry her to that brute Goring. You've heard that I suppose? But of course it's nothing to you! Why should it be?"

He paused, and Vennie interrupted him sharply. "It is a great deal to us, Mr. Andersen! Every cruel thing that is done in a place affects everyone who lives in the place. If Mr. Taxater and — and Mr. Clavering — thought that Miss Traffio was being driven into this marriage, I'm sure they would not allow it! They would do something — everything — to stop such an outrage. Wouldn't you, Mr. Taxater?"

"But surely, Vennie," said the theologian, "you have heard something of this? You can't be quite so oblivious, as all that, to the village scandal?"

He spoke with a certain annoyance as people are apt to do, when some disagreeable abuse, which they have sought to forget, is brought vividly before them.

Vennie, too, became irritable. The question of Lacrima's marriage had more than once given her conscience a sharp stab. "I think it is a shame to us all," she cried vehemently, "that this should be allowed. It is only lately that I've heard rumours of it, and I took them for mere gossip. It's been on my mind." She looked almost sternly at the theologian. "I meant to talk to you about it. But other things came between. I haven't seen Lacrima for several weeks. Surely, if it is as Mr. Andersen says, something ought to be done! It is a horrible, perfectly horrible idea!" She covered her face with her hands as if to shut out some unbearable vision.

James Andersen watched them both intently, leaning against the wood-work of the church-door.

"I thought you all knew of this," he said presently. "Perhaps you did; but the devil prompted you to say nothing. There are a great many things in this world which are done while people — good people — look on — and nothing said. Do you wonder now that the end of this business will be a curious one; I mean for me? For you know, of course, what is going to happen? You know why I have been chosen to work at this particular piece of carving? And why, ever since I quarelled with Luke and drank in Hullaway Inn, I have heard voices in my head? The reason of that is, that Leo's Hill is angry because I have deserted it. Every stone I touch is angry, and keeps talking to me and upbraiding me. The voices I hear are the voices of all the stones I have ever worked with in my life. But they needn't fret themselves. The end will surprise even them. *They* do not know," — here his voice took a lower tone, and he assumed that ghastly air of imparting a piece of surprising, but quite natural, information, which is one of the most sinister tokens of monomania, — "that I shall very soon be, even as they are! Isn't it funny they don't know that, Miss Seldom? Isn't it a curious thing, Mr. Taxater? I thought of that, just now, as I chipped the dirt from King Stephen. Even *he* didn't know, the foolish centaur! And yet he has been up there, seeing this sort of thing done, for seven hundred years! I expect he has seen so many girls dragged under this arch, with sick terror in their hearts, that he has grown callous to it. A callous king! A knavish-smiling king! It makes me laugh to think how little he cares!"

The unfortunate man did indeed proceed to laugh;

but the sound of it was so ghastly, even to himself, that he quickly became grave.

"Luke will be here soon," he said. "Luke has always come for me, these last few days, when his work is over. It'll be over soon now, I think. He may be here any moment; so I'd better finish the job. Don't you worry about Lacrima, ladies and gentlemen! She'll fly away with the rooks. This centaur-king will never reach *her* with his arrows. It'll be me, not her, he'll turn into stone!"

He became silent and continued his labour upon the carving. The wonder was that with his head full of such mad fancies he could manage so delicate a piece of work. Mr. Taxater and Vennie watched him in amazement.

"I think," whispered the latter presently, "we'd better wait in the churchyard till his brother comes. I don't like leaving him in this state."

Mr. Taxater nodded, and retreating to the further end of the path, they sat down together upon a flat tombstone.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Taxater, after a minute or two's silence, "that I spoke rather crossly to you just now. The truth is, the man's reference to that Italian girl made me feel ashamed of myself. I have not your excuse of being ignorant of what was going on. I have, in fact, been meaning to talk to you about it for some weeks; but I hesitated, wishing to be quite sure of my ground first.

"Even now, you must remember, we have no certain authority to go upon. But I'm afraid — I'm very much afraid — what Andersen says is true. It is evidently his own certain knowledge of it that

has upset his brain. And I'm inclined to take his word for it. I fear the girl must have told him herself; and it was the shock of hearing it from her that had this effect.

"There's no doubt he's seriously ill. But if I know anything of these things, it's rather a case of extreme nervous agitation than actual insanity. In any event, it's a relief to remember that this kind of mania is, of all forms of brain-trouble, the easiest cured."

Vennie made an imperious little gesture. "We *must* cure him!" she cried. "We must! We must! And the only way to do it, as far as I can see, is to stop this abominable marriage. Lacrima can't be doing it willingly. No girl would marry a man like that, of her own accord."

Mr. Taxater shook his head. "I'm afraid there are few people," he remarked, "that some girl or other wouldn't marry if the motive were strong enough! The question is, what is the motive in this instance?"

"What can Mr. Quincunx be thinking of?" said Vennie. "He hasn't been up to see mother lately. In fact, I don't think he has been in our house since he began working in Yeoborough. That's another abominable shame! It seems to me more and more clear that there's an evil destiny hanging over this place, driving people on to do wicked things!"

"I'm afraid we shall get small assistance from Mr. Quincunx," said the theologian. "The relations between him and Lacrima are altogether beyond my power of unravelling. But I cannot imagine his taking any sort of initiative in any kind of difficulty."

"Then what are we to do?" pleaded Vennie, looking anxiously into the diplomatist's face.

Mr. Taxater rested his chin upon the handle of his cane and made no reply.

At this moment the gate clicked behind them, and Luke Andersen appeared. He glanced hastily towards the porch; but his brother was absorbed in his work and apparently had heard nothing. Stepping softly along the edge of the path he approached the two friends. He looked very anxious and troubled.

Raising his hat to Vennie, he made a gesture with his hand in his brother's direction. "Have you seen him?" he enquired. "Has he talked to you?"

The theologian nodded.

"Oh, I think all this is dreadful!" whispered Vennie. "I'm more distressed than I can tell you. I'm afraid he's very, very ill. And he keeps talking about Miss Traffio. Surely something can be done, Mr. Andersen, to stop that marriage before it's too late?"

Luke turned upon her with an expression completely different from any she had ever seen him wear before. He seemed to have suddenly grown much older. His mouth was drawn, and a little open; and his cheeks were pale and indented by deep lines.

"I would give my soul," he said with intense emphasis, "to have this thing otherwise. I have already been to Lacrima — to Miss Traffio, I mean — but she will do nothing. She is mad, too, I think. I hoped to get her to marry my brother, off-hand, anyhow; and leave the place with him. But she won't hear of it. I can't understand her! It almost

seems as if she *wanted* to marry that clown. But she can't really; it's impossible. I'm afraid that fool Quincunx is at the bottom of it."

"Something must be done! Something must be done!" wailed Vennie.

"*Sustinuit anima mea in verbo ejus!*" muttered Mr. Taxater. "*Speravit anima mea in Domino.*"

"I shouldn't mind so much the state he's in," continued Luke, "if I didn't remember how my mother went. She got just like this before she died. It's true my father was a brute to her. But this different kind of blow seems to have just the same effect upon James. Fool that I am, I must needs start a miserable quarrel with him when he was most worried. If anything happens, I tell you I shall feel I'm responsible for the whole thing, and no one else!"

All this while Mr. Taxater had remained silent, his chin on the handle of his cane. At last he lifted up his head.

"I think," he began softly, "I should rather like a word alone with Mr. Luke, Vennie. Perhaps you wouldn't mind wandering down the lane a step or two? Then I can follow you; and we'll leave this young man to get his brother home."

The girl rose obediently and pressed the youth's hand. "If anyone can help you," she said with a look of tender sympathy, "it is Mr. Taxater. He has helped me in my trouble."

As soon as Vennie was out of hearing the theologian looked straight into Luke's face.

"I have an idea," he said, "that if any two people can find a way out of this wretched business, it is you and I together."

"Well, sir," said Luke, seating himself by Mr. Taxater's side and glancing apprehensively towards the church-porch; "I have tried what I can do with Miss Romer, but she maintains that nothing she can say will make any difference to Miss Traffio."

"I fancy there is one thing, however, that would make a difference to Mr. Quincunx," remarked the theologian significantly. "I am taking for granted," he added, "that it is this particular marriage which weighs so heavily on your brother. He would not suffer if he saw her wedded to a man she loved?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Luke, "your idea is to appeal to Quincunx. I've thought of that, too. But I'm afraid it's hopeless. He's such an inconceivably helpless person. Besides, he's got no money."

"Suppose we secured him the money?" said Mr. Taxater.

Luke's countenance momentarily brightened; but the cloud soon settled on it again.

"We couldn't get enough," he said with a sigh. "Unless," he added, with a glimmer of humour, "you or some other noble person has more cash to dispose of than I fancy is at all likely! To persuade Quincunx into any bold activity we should have to guarantee him a comfortable annuity for the rest of his life, and an assurance of his absolute security from Romer's vengeance. It would have to be enough for Lacrima, too, you understand!"

The theologian shook the dew-drops from a large crimson rose which hung within his reach.

"What precise sum would you suggest," he asked, "as likely to be a sufficient inducement?"

The stone-carver meditated. "Those two could live quite happily," he remarked at last, "on two hundred a year."

"It is a large amount to raise," said Mr. Taxater. "I fear it is quite beyond my power and the power of the Seldoms, even if we combined our efforts. How right Napoleon was, when he said that in any campaign, the first, second, and third requisite was money!

"It only shows how foolish those critics of the Catholic Church are, who blame her for laying stress upon the temporal side of our great struggle against evil. In this world, as things go, one always strikes sooner or later against the barrier of money. The money-question lies at the bottom of every subterranean abuse and every hidden iniquity that we unmask. It's a wretched thing that it should be so, but we have to accept it; until one of Vennie's angels" — he added in an under-tone — "descends to help us! Your poor brother began talking just now about the power of stone. I referred him to the Cross of our Lord — which is made of another material!

"But unfortunately in the stress of this actual struggle, you and I, my dear Andersen, find ourselves, as you see, compelled to call in the help, not of wood, but of gold. Gold, and gold alone, can furnish us with the means of undermining these evil powers!"

The texture of Mr. Taxater's mind was so nicely inter-threaded with the opposite strands of metaphysical and Machiavellian wisdom, that this discourse, fantastic as it may sound to us, fell from him as naturally as rain from a heavy cloud. Luke

Andersen's face settled into an expression of hopeless gloom.

"The thing is beyond us, then," he said. "I certainly can't provide an enormous sum like that. James' and my savings together only amount to a few hundreds. And if no quixotic person can be discovered to help us, we are bound hand and foot.

"Oh I should like," he cried, "to make this place ring and ting with our triumph over that damned Romer!"

"*Quis est iste Rex gloriæ?*" muttered the Theologian. "*Dominus fortis et potens; Dominus potens in prælio.*"

"I shall never dare," went on the stone-carver, "to get my brother away into a home. The least thought of such a thing would drive him absolutely out of his mind. He'll have to be left to drift about like this, talking madly to everyone he meets, till something terrible happens to him. God! I could howl with rage, to think how it all might be saved if only that ass Quincunx had a little gall!"

Mr. Taxater tapped the young man's wrist with his white fingers. "I think we can put gall into him between us," he said. "I think so, Andersen."

"You've got some idea, sir!" cried Luke, looking at the theologian. "For Heaven's sake, let's have it! I am completely at the end of my tether."

"This American who is engaged to Gladys is immensely rich, isn't he?" enquired Mr. Taxater.

"Rich?" answered Luke. "That's not the word for it! The fellow could buy the whole of Leo's Hill and not know the difference."

Mr. Taxater was silent, fingering the gold cross upon his watch-chain.

"It remains with yourself then," he remarked at last.

"What!" cried the astonished Luke.

"I happen to be aware," continued the diplomatist, calmly, "that there is a certain fact which our friend from Ohio would give half his fortune to know. He certainly would very willingly sign the little document for it, that would put Mr. Quincunx and Miss Traffio into a position of complete security. It is only a question of 'the terrain of negotiation,' as we say in our ecclesiastical circles."

Luke Andersen's eyes opened very widely, and the amazement of his surprise made him look more like an astounded faun than ever — a faun that has come bolt upon some incredible triumph of civilization.

"I will be quite plain with you, young man," said the theologian. "It has come to my knowledge that you and Gladys Romer are more than friends; have been more than friends, for a good while past.

"Do not wave your hand in that way! I am not speaking without evidence. I happen to know as a positive fact that this girl is neither more nor less than your mistress. I am also inclined to believe — though of this, of course, I cannot be sure — that, as a result of this intrigue, she is likely, before the autumn is over, to find herself in a position of considerable embarrassment. It is no doubt, with a view to covering such embarrassment — you understand what I mean, Mr. Andersen? — that she is making preparations to have her marriage performed earlier than was at first intended."

"God!" cried the astounded youth, losing all self-

possession, "how, under the sun, did you get to know this?"

Mr. Taxater smiled. "We poor controversialists," he said, "have to learn, in self-defence, certain innocent arts of observation. I don't think that you and your mistress," he added, "have been so extraordinarily discreet, that it needed a miracle to discover your secret."

Luke Andersen recovered his equanimity with a vigorous effort. "Well?" he said, rising from his seat and looking anxiously at his brother, "what then?"

As he uttered these words the young stone-carver's mind wrestled in grim austerity with the ghastly hint thrown out by his companion. He divined with an icy shock of horror the astounding proposal that this amazing champion of the Faith was about to unfold. He mentally laid hold of this proposal as a man might lay hold upon a red-hot bar of iron. The interior fibres of his being hardened themselves to grasp without shrinking its appalling treachery.

Luke had it in him, below his urbane exterior, to rend and tear away every natural, every human scruple. He had it in him to be able to envisage, with a shamelessness worthy of some lost soul of the Florentine's Inferno, the fire-scorched walls of such a stark dilemma. The palpable suggestion which now hung, as it were, suspended in the air between them, was a suggestion he was ready to grasp by the throat.

The sight of his brother's gaunt figure, every line of which he knew and loved so well, turned his conscience to adamant. Sinking into the depths of his soul, as a diver might sink into an ice-cold sea, he felt that there was literally *nothing* he would not do, if his dear Daddy James could be restored to sanity and happiness.

Gladys? He would walk over the bodies of a hundred Gladyses, if that way, and that alone, led to his brother's restoration!

"What then?" he repeated, turning a bleak but resolute face upon Mr. Taxater.

The theologian continued: "Why, it remains for you, or for someone deputed by you, to reveal to our unsuspecting American exactly how his betrothed has betrayed him. I have no doubt that in the disturbance this will cause him we shall have no difficulty in securing his aid in this other matter. It would be a natural, an inevitable revenge for him to take. Himself a victim of these Romers, what more appropriate, what more suitable, than that he should help us in liberating their other victims? If he is as wealthy as you say, it would be a mere bagatelle for him to set our good Quincunx upon his feet forever, and Lacrima with him! It is the kind of thing it would naturally occur to him to do. It would be a revenge; but a noble revenge. He would leave Nevilton then, feeling that he had left his mark; that he had made himself felt. Americans like to make themselves felt."

Luke's countenance, in spite of his interior acquiescence, stiffened into a haggard mask of dismay.

"But this is beyond anything one has ever heard of!" he protested, trying in vain to assume an air of levity. "It is beyond everything. Actually to convey, to the very man one's girl is going to marry, the news of her seduction! Actually to 'coin her for drachmas,' as it says somewhere! It's a monstrous thing, an incredible thing!"

"Not a bit more monstrous than your original sin in seducing the girl," said Mr. Taxater.

"That is the usual trick," he went on sternly, "of you English people! You snatch at your little pleasures, without any scruple, and feel yourselves quite honourable. And then, directly it becomes a question of paying for them, by any form of public confession, you become fastidiously scrupulous."

"But to give one's girl away, to betray her in this shameless manner oneself! It seems to me the ultimate limit of scurvy meanness!"

"It only seems to you so, because the illusion of chivalry enters into it; in other words, because public opinion would condemn you! This honourable shielding of the woman we have sinned with, at every kind of cost to others, has been the cause of endless misery. Do you think you are preparing a happy marriage for your Gladys in your 'honourable' reticence? By saving her from this union with Mr. Dangelis — whom, by the way, she surely cannot love, if she loves you — you will be doing her the best service possible. Even if she refuses to make you her husband in his place — and I suppose her infatuation would stop at that! — there are other ways, besides marriage, of hiding her embarrassed condition. Let her travel for a year till her trouble is well over!"

Luke Andersen reflected in silence, his drooping figure indicating a striking collapse of his normal urbanity.

At last he spoke. "There may be something in what you suggest," he remarked slowly. "Obviously, *I* can't be the one," he added, after a further pause, "to strike this astounding bargain with the American."

"I don't see why not," said the theologian, with a certain maliciousness in his tone, "I don't see why

not. You have been the one to commit the sin; you ought naturally to be the one to perform the penance."

The luckless youth distorted his countenance into such a wry grimace, that he caused it to resemble the stone gargoyles which protruded their lewd tongues from the church roof above them.

"It's a scurvy thing to do, all the same," he muttered.

"It is only relatively — 'scurvy,' as you call it," replied Mr. Taxater. "In an absolute sense, the 'scurviness' would be to let your Gladys deceive an honest man and make herself unhappy for life, simply to save you two from any sort of exposure. But as a matter of fact, I am *not* inclined to place this very delicate piece of negotiation in your hands. It would be so fatally easy for you — under the circumstances — to make some precipitate blunder that would spoil it all."

"Don't think," he went on, observing the face of his interlocutor relapsing into sudden cheerfulness, "that I let you off this penance because of its unchivalrous character. You break the laws of chivalry quite as completely by putting me into the possession of the facts.

"I shall, of course," he added, "require from you some kind of written statement. The thing must be put upon an unimpeachable ground."

Luke Andersen's relief was not materially modified by this demand. He began to fumble in his pocket for his cigarette-case.

"The great point to be certain of," continued Mr. Taxater, "is that Quincunx and Lacrima will accept the situation, when it is thus presented to

them. But I don't think we need anticipate any difficulty. In case of Dangelis' saying anything to Mr. Romer, though I do not for a moment imagine he will, it would be well if you and your brother were prepared to move, if need were, to some other scene of action. There is plenty of demand for skilled workmen like yourselves, and you have no ties here."

The young man made a deprecatory movement with his hands.

"We neither of us should like that, very much, sir. James and I are fonder of Nevilton than you might imagine."

"Well, well," responded the theologian, "we can discuss that another time. Such a thing may not be necessary. I am glad to see, my friend," he added, "that whatever wrong you have done, you are willing to atone for it. So I trust our little plan will work out successfully. Perhaps you will look in, tomorrow night? I shall be at leisure then, and we can make our arrangements. Well, Heaven protect you, '*a sagitta volante in die, a negotio perambulante in tenebris.*'"

He crossed himself devoutly as he spoke, and giving the young man a friendly wave of the hand, and an encouraging smile, let himself out through the gate and proceeded to follow the patient Vennie.

He overtook his little friend somewhere not far from the lodge of that admirable captain, whose neatly-cut laurel hedge had witnessed, according to the loquacious Mrs. Fringe, the strange encounter between Jimmy Pringle and his Maker. Vennie was straying slowly along by the hedge-side, trailing her hand through the tall dead grasses. Hearing Mr. Taxater's footsteps, she turned eagerly to meet him.

"Well," she asked, "what does Luke say about his brother? Is it as bad as we feared?"

"He doesn't think," responded the theologian, "any more than I do, that the thing has gone further than common hallucination."

"And Lacrima — poor little Lacrima! — have you decided what we must do to intervene in her case?"

"I think it may be said," responded the scholar gravely, "that we have hit upon an effective way of stopping that marriage. But perhaps it would be pleasanter and easier for you to remain at present in ignorance of our precise plan. I know," he added, smiling, "you do not care for hidden conspiracies."

Vennie frowned. "I don't see why," she said, "there should be anything hidden about it! It seems to me, the thing is so abominable, that one would only have to make it public, to put an end to it completely.

"I hope" — she clasped her hands — "I do hope, you are not fighting the evil one with the weapons of the evil one? If you are, I am sure it will end unhappily. I am sure and certain of it!"

She spoke with a fervour that seemed almost prophetic; and as she did so, she unconsciously waved — with a pathetic little gesture of protest — the bunch of dead grasses which she held in her hand.

Mr. Taxater walked gravely by her side; his profile, in its imperturbable immobility, resembling the mask of some great mediæval ecclesiastic. The only reply he made to her appeal was to quote the famous Psalmodic invocation: "*Nisi Dominus ædificaverit domum, in vanum laboraverunt qui ædificant eam.*"

It would have been clear to anyone who had over-

heard his recent conversation with Luke, and now watched his reception of Vennie's instinctive protest, that whatever the actions of this remarkable man were, they rested upon a massive foundation of unshakable philosophy.

There was little further conversation between them; and at the vicarage gate, they separated with a certain air of estrangement. With undeviating feminine clairvoyance, Vennie was persuaded in the depths of her mind that whatever plan had been hit upon by the combined wits of the theologian and Luke, it was one whose nature, had she known it, would have aroused her most vehement condemnation. Nor in this persuasion will the reader of our curious narrative regard her as far astray from the truth.

Meanwhile the two brothers were also returning slowly along the road to Nevilton. Had Mr. Clavering, whose opinion of the younger stone-carver was probably lower than that of any of his other critics, seen Luke during this time, he might have formed a kindlier judgment of him. Nothing could have exceeded the tact and solicitude with which he guided the conversation into safe channels. Nothing could have surpassed, in affectionate tenderness, the quick, anxious glances he every now and then cast upon his brother. There are certain human expressions which flit suddenly across the faces of men and women, which reveal, with the seal of absolute authenticity, the depth of the emotion they betray. Such a flitting expression, of a love almost maternal in its passionate depth, crossed the face of Luke Andersen at more than one stage of their homeward walk.

James seemed, on the whole, rather better than earlier in the day. The most ominous thing he did was to begin a long incoherent discourse about the rooks which kept circling over their heads on their way to the tall trees of Wild Pine. But this particular event of the rooks' return to their Nevilton roosting-place was a phase of the local life of that spot calculated to impress even perfectly sane minds with romantic suggestion. It was always a sign of the breaking up of the year's pristine bloom when they came, a token of the not distant approach of the shorter equinoctial days. They flew hither, these funereal wayfarers, from far distant feeding-grounds. They did not nest in the Nevilton woods. Nevilton was to them simply a habitation of sleep. Many of them never even saw it, except in its morning and evening twilight. The place drew them to it at nightfall, and rejected them at sunrise. In the interval they remained passive and unconscious — huddled groups of black obscure shapes, tossed to and fro in their high branches, their glossy heads full of dreams beyond the reach of the profoundest sage. Before settling down to rest, however, it was their custom, even on the stormiest evenings, to sweep round, above the roofs of the village, in wide airy circles of restless flight, uttering their harsh familiar cries. Sailing quietly on a peaceful air or roughly buffeted by rainy gusts of wind — those westerly winds that are so wild and intermittent in this corner of England — these black tribes of the twilight give a character to their places of favourite resort which resembles nothing else in the world. The cawing of rooks is like the crying of sea-gulls. It is a sound that more

than anything flings the minds of men back to "old unhappy far-off things."

The troubled soul of the luckless stone-carver went tossing forth on this particular night of embalmed stillness, driven in the track of those calmly circling birds, on the gust of a thought-tempest more formidable than any that the fall of the leaves could bring. But the devoted passion of the younger brother followed patiently every flight it took; and by the time they had reached the vicarage-gate, and turned down the station-hill towards their lodging, the wild thoughts had fallen into rest, and like the birds in the dusk of their sheltering branches, were soothed into blessed forgetfulness.

Luke had recourse, before they reached their dwelling, to the magic of old memories; and the end of that unforgettable day was spent by the two brothers in summoning up childish recollections, and in evoking the images and associations of their earliest compacts of friendship.

When he left his brother asleep and stood for a while at the open window, Luke prayed a vague heathen prayer to the planetary spaces above his head. A falling star happened to sweep downward at that moment behind the dark pyramid of Nevilton Mount, and this natural phenomenon seemed to his excited nerves a sort of elemental answer to his invocation; as if it had been the very bolt of Sagittarius, the Archer, aimed at all the demons that darkened his brother's soul!

CHAPTER XVIII

VOICES BY THE WAY

THE morning which followed James Andersen's completion of his work in Athelston church-porch, was one of the loveliest of the season. The sun rose into a perfectly cloudless sky. Every vestige of mist had vanished, and the half-cut corn-fields lay golden and unshadowed in the translucent air. Over the surface of every upland path, the little waves of palpable ether vibrated and quivered. The white roads gleamed between their tangled hedges as if they had been paved with mother-of-pearl. The heat was neither oppressive nor sultry. It penetrated without burdening, and seemed to flow forth upon the earth, as much from the general expanse of the blue depths as from the limited circle of the solar luminary.

James Andersen seemed more restored than his brother had dared to hope. They went to their work as usual; and from the manner in which the elder stone-carver spoke to his mates and handled his tools, none would have guessed at the mad fancies which had so possessed him during the previous days.

Luke was filled with profound happiness and relief. It is true that, like a tiny cloud upon the surface of this clear horizon, the thought of his projected betrayal of his mistress remained present with him.

But in the depths of his heart he knew that he would have betrayed twenty mistresses, if by that means the brother of his soul could be restored to sanity.

He had already grown completely weary of Gladys. The clinging and submissive passion with which the proud girl had pursued him of late had begun to irritate his nerves. More than once — especially when her importunities interrupted his newer pleasures — he had found himself on the point of hating her. He was absolutely cynical — and always had been — with regard to the ideal of faithfulness in these matters. Even the startling vision of the indignant Dangelis putting into her hands — as he supposed the American might naturally do — the actual written words with which he betrayed her, only ruffled his equanimity in a remote and even half-humorous manner. He recalled her contemptuous treatment of him on the occasion of their first amorous encounter and it was not without a certain malicious thrill of triumph that he realized how thoroughly he had been revenged.

He had divined without difficulty on the occasion of their return from Hullaway that Gladys was on the point of revealing to him the fact that she was likely to have a child; and since that day he had taken care to give her little opportunity for such revelations. Absorbed in anxiety for James, he had been anxious to postpone this particular crisis between them till a later occasion.

The situation, nevertheless, whenever he had thought of it, had given him, in spite of its complicated issues, an undeniable throb of satisfaction. It was such a complete, such a triumphant victory,

over Mr. Romer. Luke in his heart had an unblushing admiration for the quarry-owner, whose masterly attitude towards life was not so very different from his own. But this latent respect for his employer rather increased than diminished his complacency in thus striking him down. The remote idea that, in the whirligig of time, an offspring of his own should come to rule in Nevilton house—as seemed by no means impossible, if matters were discreetly managed—was an idea that gave him a most delicate pleasure.

As they strolled back to breakfast together, across the intervening field, and admired the early dahlias in the station-master's garden, Luke took the risk of testing his brother on the matter of Mr. Quincunx. He was anxious to be quite certain of his ground here, before he had his interview with the tenant of the Gables.

"I wish," he remarked casually, "that Maurice Quincunx would show a little spirit and carry Lacrima off straight away."

James looked closely at him. "If he would," he said, "I'd give him every penny I possess and I'd work day and night to help them! O Luke—Luke!" he stretched out his arm towards Leo's Hill and pronounced what seemed like a vow before the Eumenides themselves; "if I could make her happy, if I could only make her happy, I would be buried tomorrow in the deepest of those pits."

Luke registered his own little resolution in the presence of this appeal to the gods. "Gladys? What is Gladys to me compared with James? All girls are the same. They all get over these things."

Meanwhile James Andersen was repeating in a low voice to himself the quaint name of his rival.

"He is an ash-root, a tough ash-root," he muttered. "And that's the reason he has been chosen. There's nothing in the world but the roots of trees that can undermine the power of Stone! The trees can do it. The trees will do it. What did that Catholic say? He said it was Wood against Stone. That's the reason I can't help her. I have worked too long at Stone. I am too near Stone. That's the reason Quincunx has been chosen. She and I are under the power of Stone, and we can't resist it, any more than the earth can! But ash-tree roots can undermine anything. If only she would take my money, if only she would."

This last aspiration was uttered in a voice loud enough for Luke to hear; and it may be well believed that it fortified him all the more strongly in his dishonourable resolution.

During breakfast James continued to show signs of improvement. He talked of his mother, and though his conversation was sprinkled with somewhat fantastic imagery, on the whole it was rational enough.

While the meal was still in progress, the younger brother observed through the window the figure of a woman, moving oddly backwards and forwards along their garden-hedge, as if anxious at the same time to attract and avoid attention. He recognized her in a moment as the notorious waif of the neighborhood, the somewhat sinister Witch-Bessie. He made an excuse to his brother and slipped out to speak to her.

Witch-Bessie had grown, if possible, still more dehumanized since when two months ago she had cursed Gladys Romer. Her skin was pallid and livid as parchment. The eyes which stared forth from her wrinkled expressionless face were of a dull glaucous blue, like the inside of certain sun-bleached sea-shells. She was dressed in a rough sack-cloth petticoat, out of which protruded her stockingless feet, only half concealed by heavy labourer's boots, unlaced and in large holes. Over her thin shoulders she wore a ragged woolen shawl which served the office not only of a garment, but also of a wallet; for, in the folds of it, were even now observable certain half-eaten pieces of bread, and bits of ancient cheese, which she had begged in her wanderings. In one of her withered hands she held a large bunch of magenta-coloured, nettle-like flowers, of the particular species known to botanists as marsh-wound-wort. As soon as Luke appeared she thrust these flowers into his arms.

"Gathered 'un for 'ee," she whispered, in a thin whistling voice, like the soughing of wind in a bed of rushes. "They be capital weeds for them as be moon-smitten. Gathered 'un, up by Seven Ashes, where them girt main roads do cross. Take 'un, mister; take 'un and thank an old woman wot loves both of 'ee, as heretofore she did love your long-sufferin' mother. I were bidin' down by Minister's back gate, expectin' me bit of oddments, when they did tell I, all sudden-like, as how he'd been taken, same as *she* was."

"It's most kind of you, Bessie," said Luke graciously. "You and I have always been good friends."

The old woman nodded. "So we be, mister, and let none say the contrary! I've a dangled 'ee, afore-now, in these very arms. Dost mind how 'ee drove that ramping girt dog out of Long-Load Barton when the blarsted thing were for laying hold of I?"

"But what must I do with these?" asked the stone-carver, holding the bunch of pungent scented flowers to his face.

"That's wot I was just a-going to tell 'ee," whispered the old woman solemnly. "I suppose *he's* in there now, eh? Let 'un be, poor man. Let 'un be. Maybe the Lord's only waitin' for these 'ere weeds to mend 'is poor swimey wits. You do as I do tell 'ee, mister, and 'twill be all smoothed out, as clean as church floor. You take these blessed weeds,—'viviny-lobs' my old mother did call 'em—and hang 'em to dry till they be dead and brown. Then doddy a sprinkle o' good salt on 'em, and dip 'em in clear water. Be you followin' me, mister Luke?"

The young man nodded.

"Then wot you got to do, is for to strike 'em 'against door-post, and as you strikes 'em, you says, same as I says now." And Witch-Bessie repeated the following archaic enchantment.

Marshy hollow woundy-wort,
Growing on the holy dirt,
In the Mount of Calvary
There was thou found.
In the name of sweet Jesus
I take thee from the ground.
O Lord, effect the same,
That I do now go about.

Luke listened devoutly to these mysterious words, and repeated them twice, after the old woman. Their two figures, thus concerted in magical tutelage, might, for all the youth's modern attire, have suggested to a scholarly observer some fantastic heathen scene out of Apuleius. The spacious August sunshine lay splendid upon the fields about them, and light-winged swallows skimmed the surface of the glittering railway-line as though it had been a flowing river.

When she was made assured in her mind that her pupil fully understood the healing incantation, Witch-Bessie shuffled off without further words. Her face, as she resumed her march in the direction of Hullaway, relapsed into such corpse-like rigidity, that, but for her mechanical movement, one might have expected the shameless flocks of starlings who hovered about her, to settle without apprehension upon her head.

The two brothers labored harmoniously side by side in their work-shop all that forenoon. It was Saturday, and their companions were anxious to throw down their tools and clear out of the place on the very stroke of the one o'clock bell.

James and Luke were both engaged upon a new stone font, the former meticulously chipping out its angle-mouldings, and the latter rounding, with chisel and file, the capacious lip of its deep basin. It was a cathedral font, intended for use in a large northern city.

Luke could not resist commenting to his brother, in his half-humorous half-sentimental way, upon the queer fact that they two — their heads full of their

own anxieties and troubles — should be thus working upon a sacred font which for countless generations, perhaps as long as Christianity lasted, would be associated with so many strange and mingled feelings of perturbation and hope.

"It's a comical idea," he found himself saying, though the allusion was sufficiently unwise, "this idea of Gladys' baptism."

He regretted his words the moment they were out of his mouth; but James received them calmly.

"I once heard," he answered, "I think it was on the sands at Weymouth, two old men discussing quite reverently and gravely whether an infant, baptized before it was born, would be brought under the blessing of the Church. I thought, as I listened to them, how vulgar and gross-minded our age had become, that I should have to tremble with alarm lest any flippant passer-by should hear their curious speculation. It seemed to me a much more important matter to discuss, than the merits of the black-faced Pierrots who were fooling and howling just beyond. This sort of seriousness, in regard to the strange borderland of the Faith, has always seemed to me a sign of pathetic piety, and the very reverse of anything blasphemous."

Luke had made an involuntary movement when his brother's anecdote commenced. The calmness and reasonableness with which James had spoken was balm and honey to the anxious youth; but he could not help speculating in his heart whether his brother was covertly girding at him. Did he, he wondered, realize how far things had gone between him and the fair-haired girl?

"It's the sort of question, at any rate," he remarked rather feebly, "that would interest our friend Sir Thomas Browne. Do you remember how we read together that amazing passage in the Urn Burial?"

"'But the iniquity of oblivion,'" quoted James in answer, "'blindly scattereth her Poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Who can but pity the founder of the Pyramids? Herostratus lives that burnt the temple of Diana; he is almost lost that built it. Time has spared the epitaph of Hadrian's Horse, confounded that of himself. In vain we compute our felicities by the advantage of our good names, since bad have equal durations; and Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemnon without the favour of the everlasting register. . . . Darkness and light divide the course of time, and oblivion shares with memory a great part even of our living beings; we slightly remember our felicities and the smartest strokes of affliction leave but short smart upon us. To weep into Stones are fables.'"

He pronounced these last words with a slow and emphatic intonation.

"Fables?" he repeated, resting his hand upon the rim of the font, and lowering his voice, so as not to be heard by the men outside. "He calls them fables because he has never worked as we do — day in and day out — among nothing else. The reason he says that to weep into Stones are fables is that his own life, down at that pleasant Norwich, was such a happy one. To weep into Stones! He means, of course, that when you have endured more than you can bear, you become a Stone. But that is no fable!

Or if it was once, it isn't so today. Mr. Taxater said the Stone-Age was over. In my opinion, Luke, the Stone-Age is only now beginning. The reason of that is, that whereas, in former times, Stone was moulded by men; now, men are moulded by Stone. We have receded, instead of advancing; and the iniquity of Time which turned animals into men, is now turning men back into the elements!"

Luke cursed bitterly in his heart the rhythmic incantations of the old Norwich doctor. He had been thinking of a very different passage from that which his brother recalled. To change the conversation he asked how James wished to spend their free afternoon.

Andersen's tone changed in a moment, and he grew rational and direct. "I am going for a walk," he said, "and I think perhaps, if you don't mind, I'll go alone. My brain feels clouded and oppressed. A long walk ought to clear it. I think it will clear it; don't you?" This final question was added rather wistfully.

"I'm sure it will. Oh, it certainly will! I expect the sun has hit you a bit; or perhaps, as Mr. Taxater would say, your headache is a relative one, due to my dragging in such things as Urn Burial. But I don't quite like your going alone, Daddy James."

The elder brother smiled affectionately at him, but went on quietly with his work without replying.

When they had finished their mid-day meal they both loitered out into the field together, smoking and chatting. The afternoon promised to be as clear and beautiful as the morning, and Luke's spirits rose high. He hoped his brother, at the last moment, would not have the heart to reject his company.

The fineness of the weather, combined with the Saturday half-holiday, was attracting abroad all manner of Nevilton folk. Lads and maids, in merry noisy groups, passed and repassed. The platform of the little station was crowded with expectant passengers waiting for the train to Yeoborough.

As the brothers stood together, carelessly turning over with their sticks the fetid heads of a patch of meadow fungi, they observed two separate couples issuing, one after another, from the little swing-gate that opened on the level-crossing. They recognized both couples almost simultaneously. The first pair consisted of Annie Bristow and Phyllis Santon; the second of Vennie Seldom and Mr. Clavering.

The two girls proceeded, arm-in-arm, up the sloping path that led in the direction of Hullaway. Vennie and Mr. Clavering advanced straight towards the brothers. Luke had time to wonder vaguely whether this conjunction of Vennie and her Anglican pastor had any connection with last night's happenings.

He was too closely associated with that Gargantuan gossip, Mrs. Fringe, not to be aware that for many weeks past Miss Seldom and the young clergyman had studiously avoided one another. That they should now be walking together, indicated, to his astute mind, either a quarrel between the young lady and Mr. Taxater, or an estrangement between the vicar and Gladys. Luke was the sort of philosopher who takes for granted that in all these situations it is love for love, or hate for hate, which propels irresistibly the human mechanism and decides the most trifling incidents.

James looked angry and embarrassed at the ap-

pearance of the pair; but they were too close upon them for any escape to be possible.

"How are you today, Andersen?" began Mr. Clavering, with his usual well-meaning but indiscreet impulsiveness. "Miss Seldom tells me she was nervous about you last night. She was afraid you were working too hard."

Vennie gave him a quick reproachful glance, and made a deprecatory movement with her hands. "Are all men," she thought, "either without scruple or without common-sense?"

"I'm glad to see that I was quite mistaken," she hastened to add. "You don't look at all tired today, Mr. Andersen. And no wonder, with such a perfectly lovely afternoon! And how are you, Mr. Luke? I haven't been down to see how that Liverpool font is getting on, for ever so long. I believe you'll end by being quite as famous as your father."

Luke received this compliment in his most courtly manner. He was always particularly anxious to impress persons who belonged to the "real" upper classes with his social sang-froid.

He was at this precise moment, however, a little agitated by the conduct of the two young people who had just passed up the meadow. Instead of disappearing into the lane beyond, they continued to loiter at the gate, and finally, after an interlude of audible laughter and lively discussion, they proceeded to stretch themselves upon the grass. The sight of two amiable young women, both so extremely well known to him, and both in evident high spirits, thus enjoying the sunshine, filled our faun-like friend's mind with the familiar craving for frivolity. He caught Mr.

Clavering's glance fixed gravely upon him. He also, it appeared, was not oblivious of the loitering villagers.

"I think there are other members of your flock, sir," said James Andersen to the young vicar, "who are at the present moment more in need of your help than I am. What I need at this moment is air — air. I should like to be able to wander over the Quantocks this afternoon. Or better still, by the edge of the sea! We all need more air than we get here. It is too shut-in here — too shut-in and oppressive. There's too much stone about; and too much clay. Yes, and the trees grow too close together. Do you know, Miss Seldom, what I should like to do? I should like to pull down all the houses — I mean all the big houses — and cut down all the trees, and then perhaps the wind would be free to blow. It's wind we want — all of us — wind and air to clear our brains! Do you realize" — his voice once more took that alarming tone of confidential secretiveness, which had struck them so disagreeably the preceding evening; — "do you realize that there are evil spirits abroad in Nevilton, and that they come from the Hill over there?" He pointed towards the Leonian escarpments which could be plainly seen from where they stood, slumbering in the splendid sunshine.

"It looks more like a sphinx than a lion today, doesn't it, Miss Seldom? Oh, I should like to tear it up, bodily, from where it lies, and fling it into the sea! It blocks the horizon. It blocks the path of the west-wind. I tell you it is the burden that weighs upon us all! But I shall conquer it yet; I shall be master of it yet!" He was silent a few

seconds, while a look of supreme disappointment clouded the face of his brother; and the two newcomers gazed at him in alarm.

"I must start at once," he exclaimed abruptly. "I must get far, far off. It is air I need, air and the west-wind! No," he cried imperiously, when Luke made a movement, as if to take leave of their companions. "I must go alone. Alone! That is what I must be today: alone — and on the hills!"

He turned impatiently as he spoke; and without another word strode off towards the level-crossing.

"Surely you will not let him go like that, Mr. Andersen?" cried Vennie, in great distress.

"It would do no good," replied Luke, watching his brother pass through the gate and cross the track. "I should only make him much worse if I tried to follow him. Besides, he wouldn't let me. I don't think he'll come to any harm. I should have a different instinct about it if there were real danger. Perhaps, as he says, a good long walk may really clear his brain."

"I do pray your instinct is to be relied on," said Vennie, anxiously watching the tall figure of the stone-carver, as he ascended the vicarage hill.

"Well, if you're not going to do your duty, Andersen, I'm going to do mine!" exclaimed the vicar of Nevilton, setting off, without further parley, in pursuit of the fugitive.

"Stop! Mr. Clavering, I'll come with you," cried Vennie. And she followed her impulsive friend towards the gate.

As they ascended the hill together, keeping Andersen in sight, Clavering remarked to his companion, "I

believe that dissolute young reprobate refused to look after his brother simply because he wanted to talk to those two girls."

"What two girls?" enquired Vennie.

"Didn't you see them?" muttered the clergyman crossly. "The Bristow girl and little Phyllis Santon. They were hanging about, waiting for him."

"I'm sure you are quite wrong," replied Vennie. "Luke may have his faults, but he is devoted—madly devoted — to his brother."

"Not at all," cried Clavering almost rudely. "I know the man better than you do. He is entirely selfish. He is a selfish, sensual pleasure-seeker! He may be fond of his brother in his fashion, just because he *is* his brother, and they have the same tastes; but his one great aim is his own pleasure. He has been the worst influence I have had to contend with, in this whole village, for some time back!"

His voice trembled with rage as he spoke. It was impossible, even for the guileless Vennie, not to help wondering in her mind whether the violence of her friend's reprobation was not impelled by an emotion more personal than public. Her unlucky knowledge of what the nature of such an emotion might be did not induce her to yield meekly to his argument.

"I don't believe he saw the people you speak of any more than I did," she said.

"Saw them?" cried the priest wrathfully, quickening his pace, as Andersen disappeared round the corner of the road, so that Vennie had to trot by his side like a submissive child. "I saw the look he fixed on them. I know that look of his! I tell you he is the kind of man that does harm wherever he

goes. He's a lazy, sensual, young scoundrel. He ought to be kicked out of the place."

Vennie sighed deeply. Life in the world of men was indeed a complicated and entangled matter. She had turned, in her agitation about the stone-carver, and in her reaction from Mr. Taxater's reserve, straight to the person she loved best of all; and this was her reward, — a mere crude outburst of masculine jealousy!

They rounded the corner by her own gate, where the road to Athelston deviates at right angles. James Andersen was no longer in sight.

"Where the devil has the man got to?" cried the astonished clergyman, raging at himself for his ill-temper, and raging at Vennie for having been the witness of it.

The girl glanced up the Athelston road; and hastening forward a few paces, scanned the stately slope of the Nevilton west drive. The unfortunate man was nowhere to be seen.

From where they now stood, the whole length of the village street was visible, almost as far as the Goat and Boy. It was full of holiday-making young people, but there was no sign of Andersen's tall and unmistakable figure.

"Oh, this is dreadful!" cried Vennie. "What are we to do? Where can he have gone?"

Hugh Clavering looked angrily round. He was experiencing that curious sense, which comes to the best of men sometimes, of being the special and selected object of providential mockery.

"There are only two ways," he said. "Either he's slipped down through the orchards, along your wall,

or he's made off to Nevilton Mount! If that's what he's done, he must be now behind that hedge, over there. We should see him otherwise."

Vennie gazed anxiously in the direction indicated. "He can't have gone into our garden?" she said. "No, he'd never do that! He talked about air and hills. I expect he's where you say. Shall we go on?"

They hurried down the road until they reached a gate, on the further side of the hedge which ran to the base of Nevilton Mount. Here they entered the field. There was no sign of the fugitive; but owing to certain inequalities in the ground, and the intervention of some large elm-trees, it was still quite possible that he was only a few hundred yards in front of them. They followed the line of the hedge with all the haste they could; trusting, at every turn it made, that they would discover him. In this manner they very soon arrived at the base of the hill.

"I feel sure he's somewhere in front of us!" muttered Clavering. "How annoying it is! It was outrageous of that young scoundrel to let him go like this; — wandering about the country in that mad state! If he comes to any harm, I shall see to it that that young man is held responsible."

"Quick!" sighed Vennie breathlessly, "we'd better climb straight to the top. We *must* find him there!"

They scrambled over the bank and proceeded to make their way as hurriedly as they could through the entangled undergrowth. Hot and exhausted they emerged at last upon the level summit. Here, the grotesque little tower mocked at them with its impassive grey surface. There was no sign of the man they sought; but seated on the grass with their backs to

the edifice were the figures of the complacent Mr. Wone and one of his younger children, engaged in the agreeable occupation of devouring a water-melon. The mouth and chin of the Christian Candidate were bespattered with the luscious juice of this delectable fruit, and laid out carefully upon a magazine on his knees, was a pleasing arrangement of rind-peelings and well-sucked pips.

Mr. Wone waved his hand in polite acknowledgment of Clavering's salute. He removed his hat to Vennie, but apologized for not rising. "Taking a little holiday, you observe!" he remarked with a satisfied smile. "I see you also are inclined to make the most of this lovely summer day."

"You haven't by any chance seen the elder Andersen, have you?" enquired Clavering.

"Not a bit of it," replied the recumbent man. "I suppose I cannot offer you a piece of melon, Miss Seldom?"

The two baffled pursuers looked at one another in hopeless disappointment.

"We've lost him," muttered the priest. "He must have gone through your orchard after all."

Mr. Wone did not miss this remark. "You were looking for our good James? No. We haven't seen anything of him. No doubt he is with his brother somewhere. I believe they usually spend their Saturdays out at Hullaway."

"When does the election come off, Mr. Wone?" enquired Vennie, hastily, extremely unwilling that her tactless companion should disclose the purpose of their search.

"In a week's time from next Monday," replied the

Candidate. "This will be my last free day till then. I have to make thirty speeches during the next seven days. Our cause goes well. I believe, with God's great help, we are practically certain of victory. It will be a great event, Miss Seldom, a great event."

Mr. Clavering made a hopeless sign to Vennie, indicative of the uselessness of any further steps to retake the runaway.

"I think your side will win in the country generally," he remarked. "As to this district, I cannot tell. Mr. Romer has strengthened himself considerably by his action after the strike."

The candidate placed a carefully selected piece of fruit in his mouth, and called to his little boy, who was scratching his initials with a knife upon the base of the tower.

"He will be beaten all the same," he said. "He is bound to be beaten. The stars in their courses must fight against a man like that. I feel it in the air; in the earth; in these beautiful trees. I feel it everywhere. He has challenged stronger powers than you or me. He has challenged the majesty of God Himself. I'll give you the right" — he went on in a voice that mechanically assumed a preacher's tone — "to call me a liar and a false prophet, if by this time, in ten days, the oppressor of the poor does not find himself crushed and beaten!"

"I am afraid right and wrong are more strangely mixed in this world than all that, Mr. Wone," Vennie found herself saying, with a little weary glance over the wide sun-bathed valleys extended at their feet.

"Pardon me, pardon me, young lady," cried the Candidate. "In this great cause there can be no

doubt, no question, no ambiguity. The evolution of the human race has reached a point when the will of God must reveal itself in the triumph of love and liberty. Nothing else matters. All turns upon this. That is why I feel that my campaign is more than a political struggle. It is a religious struggle, and on our side are the great moral forces that uphold the world!"

Vennie's exhausted nerves completely broke down upon this.

"Shall we go?" she said, touching her companion on the sleeve.

Clavering nodded, and bade the melon-eater "good afternoon," with a brusque gesture.

As they went off, he turned on his heel. "The will of God, Mr. Wone, is only to be found in the obedient reception of His sacraments."

The Christian candidate opened his mouth with amazement. "Those young people," he thought to himself, "are up to no good. They'll end by becoming papists, if they go on like this. Its extraordinary that the human mind should actually *prefer* slavery to freedom!"

Meanwhile the man whose mysterious evasion of his pursuers had resulted in this disconcerting encounter was already well-advanced on his way towards the Wild Pine ridge. He had, as a matter of fact, crossed the field between the west drive and the Vicarage-garden, and skirting the orchards below Nevilton House, had plunged into the park.

A vague hope of meeting Lacrima — an instinctive rather than a conscious feeling — had led him in this direction. Once in the park, the high opposing ridge,

crowned with its sentinel-line of tall Scotch-firs, arrested his attention and drew him towards it. He crossed the Yeoborough road and ascended the incline of Dead Man's Lane.

As he passed the cottage of his rival, he observed Mr. Quincunx energetically at work in his garden. On this occasion the recluse was digging up, not weeds, but young potatoes. He was in his shirt-sleeves and looked hot and tired.

Andersen leaned upon the little gate and observed him with curious interest. "Why isn't she here?" he muttered to himself. Then, after a pause: "He is an ash-root. Let him drag that house down! Why doesn't he drag it down, with all its heavy stones? And the Priory too? And the Church; — yes; and the Church too! He burrows like a root. He looks like a root. I must tell him all these things. I must tell him why he has been chosen, and I have been rejected!" He opened the gate forthwith and advanced towards the potato-digger.

Mr. Quincunx might have struck the imagination of a much less troubled spirit than that of the poor stone-carver as having a resemblance to a root. His form was at once knotted and lean, fibrous and delicate. His face, by reasqn of his stooping position, was suffused with a rich reddish tint, and his beard was dusty and unkempt. He rose hastily, on observing his visitor.

"People like you and me, James, are best by ourselves at these holiday-times," was his inhospitable greeting. "You can help me with my potatoes if you like. Or you can tell me your news as I work. Or do you want to ask me any question?"

He uttered these final words in such a tone as the Delphic oracle might have used, when addressing some harassed refugee.

"Has *she* been up here today?" said the stone-carver.

"I like the way you talk," replied the other. "Why should we mention their names? When I say people, I mean girls. When I say persons, I mean girls. When I say young ladies, I mean girls. And when you say 'she' you mean our girl."

"Yours!" cried the demented man; "she is yours — not ours. She is weighed down by this evil Stone, — weighed down into the deep clay. What has she to do with me, who have worked at the thing so long?"

Mr. Quincunx leant upon his hoe and surveyed the speaker. It occurred to him at once that something was amiss. "Good Lord!" he thought to himself, "the fellow has been drinking. I must get him out of this garden as quickly as possible."

"She loves you," Andersen went on, "because you are like a root. You go deep into the earth and no stone can resist you. You twine and twine and twine, and pull them all down. They are all haunted places, these houses and churches; all haunted and evil! They make a man's head ache to live in them. They put voices into a man's ears. They are as full of voices as the sea is full of waves."

"You are right there, my friend," replied Mr. Quincunx. "It's only what I've always said. Until people give up building great houses and great churches, no one will ever be happy. We ought to live in bushes and thickets, or in tents. My cottage is no better than a bush. I creep into it at night,

and out again in the morning. If its thatch fell on my head I should hardly feel it."

"You wouldn't feel it, you wouldn't!" cried the stone-carver. "And the reason of that is, that you can burrow like a root. I shouldn't feel it either, but for a different reason."

"I expect you'd better continue your walk," remarked Mr. Quincunx. "I never fuss myself about people who come to see me. If they come, they come. And when they go, they go."

The stone-carver sighed and looked round him. The sun gleamed graciously upon the warm earth, danced and sparkled upon the windows of the cottage, and made the beads of sweat on Mr. Quincunx's brow shine like diamonds.

"Do you think," he said, while the potato-digger turned to his occupation, "that happiness or unhappiness predominates in this world?"

"Unhappiness!" cried the bearded man, glaring at his acquaintance with the scowl of a goblin. "Unhappiness! Unhappiness! Unhappiness! That is why the only wise way to live is to avoid everything. That's what I always do. I avoid people, I avoid possessions, I avoid quarrels, I avoid lust, and I avoid love! My life consists in the art of avoiding things."

"She doesn't want happiness," pleaded the obsessed stone-carver. "And *her* love is enough. She only wants to escape."

"Why do you keep bringing Lacrima in?" cried the recluse. "She is going to marry John Goring. She is going to be mistress of the Priory."

A convulsive shock of fury flashed across the face of

Andersen. He made a movement that caused his interlocutor to step hurriedly backwards. But the emotion passed as rapidly as it had come.

"You would avoid everything," he said cunningly. "You would avoid everything you hate, if someone — myself for instance — or Luke — made it easy for you to save her from these houses and these churches! Luke will arrange it. He is not like us. He is wise. He knows the world. And you will only have to go on just as before, to burrow and twine! But you'll have done it. You'll have saved her from them. And then it will not matter how deep they bury me in the quarries of Leo's Hill!"

"Is he drunk? Or is he not drunk?" Mr Quincunx wondered. The news of Andersen's derangement, though it had already run like wild-fire through the village, had not yet reached his ears. For the last few days he had walked both to and from his office, and had talked to no one.

A remarkable peculiarity in this curious potato-digger was, however, his absolute and unvarying candour. Mr. Quincunx was prepared to discuss his most private concerns with any mortal or immortal visitor who stepped into his garden. He would have entered into a calm philosophical debate upon his love-affairs with a tramp, with a sailor, with the post-man, with the chimney-sweep, with the devil; or, as in this case, with his very rival in his sweetheart's affection! There was really something touching and sublime about this tendency of his. It indicated the presence, in Mr. Quincunx, of a certain mystical reverence for simple humanity, which completely contradicted his misanthropic cynicism.

"Certainly," he remarked, on this occasion, forgetting, in his interest in the subject, the recent strange outburst of his companion. "Certainly, if Lacrima and I had sufficient money to live upon, I would be inclined to risk marrying. You would advise me to, then; wouldn't you, Andersen? Anyone would advise me to, then. It would be absurd not to do it. Though, all the same, there are always great risks in two people living together, particularly nervous people, — such as we are. But what do you think, Andersen? Suppose some fairy god-mother did give us this money, would you advise us to risk it? Of course, we know, girls like a large house and a lot of servants! She wouldn't get that with me, because I hate those things, and wouldn't have them, even if I could afford it. What would you advise, Andersen, if some mad chance did make such a thing possible? Would it be worth the risk?"

An additional motive, in the queerly constituted mind of the recluse, for making this extraordinary request, was the Pariah-like motive of wishing to propitiate the stone-carver. Parallel with his humorous love of shocking people, ran, through Mr. Quincunx's nature, the naïve and innocent wish to win them over to his side; and his method of realizing this wish was to put himself completely at their mercy, laying his meanest thoughts bare, and abandoning his will to their will, so that for very shame they could not find it in them to injure him, but were softened, thrown off their guard, and disarmed. Mr. Quincunx knew no restraint in these confessions by the way, in these appeals to the voices and omens of casual encounter. He grew voluble, and even shame-

less. In quiet reaction afterwards, in the loneliness of his cottage, he was often led to regret with gloomy remorse the manner in which he had betrayed himself. It was then that he found himself hating, with the long-brooding hatred of a true solitary, the persons to whom he had exposed the recesses of his soul. At the moment of communicativeness, however, he was never able to draw rein or come to a pause. If he grew conscious that he was making a fool of himself, a curious demonic impulse in him only pressed him on to humiliate himself further.

He derived a queer inverted pleasure from thus offering himself, stripped and naked, to the smiter. It was only afterwards, in the long hours of his loneliness, that the poison of his outraged pride festered and fermented, and a deadly malice possessed him towards the recipients of his confidences. There was something admirable about the manner in which this quaint man made, out of his very lack of resistant power, a sort of sanctity of dependence. But this triumph of weakness in him, this dissolution of the very citadel of his being, in so beautiful and mystical an abandonment to the sympathy of our common humanity, was attended by lamentable issues in its resultant hatred and malice. Had Mr. Quincunx been able to give himself up to this touching candour without these melancholy and misanthropic reactions, his temper would have been very nearly the temper of a saint; but the gall and wormwood of the hours that followed, the corroding energy of the goblin of malice that was born of such unnatural humiliations, put a grievous gulf between him and the heavenly condition.

It must also be remembered, in qualification of the outrageousness, one might almost say the indecency, of his appeal to Andersen, that he had not in the remotest degree realized the extent of the stone-carver's infatuation with the Italian. Neither physical passion, nor ideal passion, were things that entered into his view of the relations between the sexes. Desire with him was of a strange and complicated subtlety, generally diffused into a mild and brooding sentiment. He was abnormally faithful, but at the same time abnormally cold; and though, very often, jealousy bit him like a viper, it was a jealousy of the mind, not a jealousy of the senses.

What in other people would have been gross and astounding cynicism, was in Mr. Quincunx a perfectly simple and even child-like recognition of elemental facts. He could sweep aside every conventional mask and plunge into the very earth-mould of reality, but he was quite unconscious of any shame, or any merit, in so doing. He simply envisaged facts, and stated the facts he envisaged, without the conventional unction of worldly discretion. This being so, it was in no ironic extravagance that he appealed to Andersen, but quite innocently, and without consciousness of anything unusual.

Of the two men, some might have supposed, considering the circumstances, that it was Mr. Quincunx who was mad, and his interlocutor who was sane. On the other hand, it might be said that only a madman would have received the recluse's appeal in the calm and serious manner in which Andersen received it. The abysmal cunning of those who have only one object in life, and are in sight of its attain-

ment, actuated the unfortunate stone-carver in his attitude to his rival at this moment.

"If some fairy or some god," he said, "did lift the stone from her sepulchre and you from your sepulchre, my advice to you and to her would be to go away, to escape, to be free. You would be happy—you would both be happy! And the reason of your happiness would be that you would know the Devil had been conquered. And you would know that, because, by gathering all the stones in the world upon my own head, and being buried beneath them, I should have made a rampart higher than Leo's Hill to protect you from the Evil One!"

Andersen's words were eager and hurried, and when he had finished speaking, he surveyed Mr. Quincunx with wild and feverish eyes. It was now borne in for the first time upon that worthy philosopher, that he was engaged in conversation with one whose wits were turned, and a great terror took possession of him. If the cunning of madmen is deep and subtle, it is sometimes surpassed by the cunning of those who are afraid of madmen.

"The most evil heap of stones I know in Nevilton," remarked Mr. Quincunx, moving towards his gate, and making a slight dismissing gesture with his hand, "is the heap in the Methodist cemetery. You know the one I mean, Andersen? The one up by Seven Ashes, where the four roads meet. It is just inside the entrance, on the left hand. They throw upon it all the larger stones they find when they dig the graves. I have often picked up bits of bones there, and pieces of skulls. It is an interesting place, a very curious place, and quite easy to find. There

haven't been many burials there lately, because most of the Methodists nowadays prefer the churchyard. But there was one last spring. That was the burial of Glory Lintot. I was there myself, and saw her put in. It's an extraordinary place. Anyone who likes to look at what people can write on tombstones would be delighted with it."

By this time, by means of a series of vague ushering movements, such as he might have used to get rid of an admirable but dangerous dog, Mr. Quincunx had got his visitor as far as the gate. This he opened, with as easy and natural an air as he could assume, and stood ostentatiously aside, to let the unfortunate man pass out.

James Andersen moved slowly into the road. "Remember!" he said. "You will avoid everything you hate! There's more in the west-wind than you imagine, these strange days. That's why the rooks are calling. Listen to them!"

He waved his hand and strode rapidly up the lane.

Mr. Quincunx gazed after the retreating figure till it disappeared, and then returned wearily to his work. He picked up his hoe and leaned heavily upon it, buried in thought. Thus he remained for the space of several minutes.

"He is right," he muttered, raising his head at last. "The rooks are beginning to gather. That means another summer is over, — and a good thing, too! I suppose I ought to have taken him back to Nevilton. But he is right about the rooks."

CHAPTER XIX

PLANETARY INTERVENTION

THE long summer afternoon was nearly over by the time James Andersen reached the Seven Ashes. The declining sun had sunk so low that it was invisible from the spot where he stood, but its last horizontal rays cast a warm ruddy light over the tree-tops in the valley. The high and exposed intersection of sandy lanes, which for time immemorial had borne this title, was, at the epoch which concerns us, no longer faithful to its name.

The ash-trees which Andersen now surveyed, with the feverish glance of mental obsession, were not seven in number. They were indeed only three; and, of these three, one was no more than a time-worn stump, and the others but newly-planted saplings. Such as they were, however, they served well enough to continue the tradition of the place, and their presence enhanced with a note of added melancholy the gloomy character of the scene.

Seven Ashes, with its cross-roads, formed indeed the extreme northern angle of the high winding ridge which terminated at Wild Pine. Approached from the road leading to this latter spot, — a road darkened on either hand by wind-swept Scotch-firs — it was the sort of place where, in less civilized times, one might have expected to encounter a threatening highwayman, or at least to have stumbled upon

some sinister witch-figure stooping over an unholy task or groping among the weeds. Even in modern times and in bright sunshine the spot was not one where a traveller was induced to linger upon his way or to rest himself. When overcast, as it was at the moment of Andersen's approach, by the coming on of twilight, it was a place from which a normal-minded person would naturally be in haste to turn. There was something ominous in its bleak exposure to the four quarters of the sky, and something full of ghostly suggestiveness in the gaping mouths of the narrow lanes that led away from it.

There was, however, another and a much more definite justification for the quickening, at this point, of any wayfarer's steps who knew the locality. A stranger to the place, glancing across an empty field, would have observed with no particular interest the presence of a moderately high stone wall protecting a small square enclosure. Were such a one acquainted with the survivals of old usage in English villages, he might have supposed these walls to shut in the now unused space of what was formerly the local "pound," or repository for stray animals. Such travellers as were familiar with Nevilton knew, however, that sequestered within this citadel of desolation were no living horses nor cattle, but very different and much quieter prisoners. The Methodist cemetery there, dates back, it is said, to the days of religious persecution, to the days of Whitfield and Wesley, if not even further.

Our fugitive from the society of those who regard their minds as normally constituted, cast an excited and recognizant eye upon this forlorn enclosure.

Plucking a handful of leaves from one of the ash-trees and thrusting them into his pocket, some queer legend—half-remembered in his agitated state—impelling him to this quaint action, he left the roadway, crossed the field, and pushing open the rusty iron gate of the little burying-ground, burst hurriedly in among its weather-stained memorials of the dead.

Though not of any great height, the enclosing walls of the place were sufficient to intensify by several degrees the gathering shadows. Outside, in the open field, one would have anticipated a clear hour of twilight before the darkness fell; but here, among the graves of these humble recalcitrants against spiritual authority, it seemed as though the plunge of the planet into its diurnal obscuring was likely to be retarded for only a few brief moments.

James Andersen sat down upon a nameless mound, and fixed his gaze upon the heap of stones referred to by Mr. Quincunx. The evening was warm and still, and though the sky yet retained much of its lightness of colour, the invading darkness—like a beast on padded feet—was felt as a palpable presence moving slowly among the tombs.

The stone-carver began muttering in a low voice scattered and incoherent repetitions of his conversation with the potato-digger. But his voice suddenly died away under a startling interruption. He became aware that the heavy cemetery gate was being pushed open from outside.

Such is the curious law regulating the action of human nerves, and making them dependent upon the mood of the mind to which they are attached,

that an event which to a normal consciousness is fraught with ghostly terror, to a consciousness already strained beyond the breaking point, appears as something natural and ordinary. It is one of the privileges of mania, that those thus afflicted should be freed from the normal oppression of human terror. A madman would take a ghost into his arms.

On this occasion, however, the most normal nerves would have suffered no shock from the figure that presented itself in the entrance when the door was fully opened. A young girl, pale and breathless, rushed impulsively into the cemetery, and catching sight of Andersen at once, hastened straight to him across the grave-mounds.

"I was coming back from the village," she gasped, preventing him with a trembling pressure of her hand from rising from his seat, and casting herself down beside him, "and I met Mr. Clavering. He told me you had gone off somewhere and I guessed at once it was to Dead Man's Lane. I said nothing to him, but as soon as he had left me, I ran nearly all the way to the cottage. The gentleman there told me to follow you. He said it was on his conscience that he had advised you to come up here. He said he was just making up his mind to come on after you, but he thought it was better for me to come. So here I am! James — dear James — you are not really ill are you? They frightened me, those two, by what they said. They seemed to be afraid that you would hurt yourself if you went off alone. But you wouldn't James dear, would you? You would think of me a little?"

She knelt at his side and tenderly pushed back the

hair from his brow. "Oh I love you so!" she murmured, "I love you so! It would kill me if anything dreadful happened to you." She pressed his head passionately against her breast, hardly conscious in her emotion of the burning heat of his forehead as it touched her skin.

"You will think of me a little!" she pleaded, "you will take care of yourself for my sake, Jim?"

She held him thus, pressed tightly against her, for several seconds, while her bosom rose and fell in quick spasms of convulsive pity. She had torn off her hat in her agitation, and flung it heedlessly down at her feet, and a heavy tress of her thick auburn hair—colourless now as the night itself—fell loosely upon her bowed neck. The fading light from the sky above them seemed to concentrate itself upon the ivory pallor of her clasped fingers and the dead-white glimmer of her impassioned face. She might have risen out of one of the graves that surrounded them, so ghostly in the gloom did her figure look.

The stone-carver freed himself at length, and took her hands in his own. The shock of the girl's emotion had quieted his own fever. From the touch of her flesh he seemed to have derived a new and rational calm.

"Little Ninsy!" he whispered. "Little Ninsy! It is not I, but you, who are ill. Have you been up, and about, many days? I didn't know it! I've had troubles of my own." He passed his hand across his forehead. "I've had dreams, dreams and fancies! I'm afraid I've made a fool of myself, and frightened all sorts of people. I think I must have been saying a lot of silly things today. My head feels

still queer. It's hurt me so much lately, my head! And I've heard voices, voices that wouldn't stop."

"Oh James, my darling, my darling!" cried the girl, in a great passion of relief. "I knew what they said wasn't true. I knew you would speak gently to me, and be your old self. Love me, James! Love me as you used to in the old days."

She rose to her feet and pulled him up upon his. Then with a passionate abandonment she flung her arms round him and pressed him to her, clinging to him with all her force and trembling as she clung.

James yielded to her emotion more spontaneously than he had ever done in his life. Their lips met in a long indrawing kiss which seemed to merge their separate identities, and blend them indissolubly together. She clung to him as a bind-weed, with its frail white flowers, might cling to a stalk of swaying corn, and not unlike such an entwined stalk, he swayed to and fro under the clinging of her limbs. The passion which possessed her communicated itself to him, and in a strange ecstasy of oblivion he embraced her as desperately as her wild love could wish.

From sheer exhaustion their lips parted at last, and they sank down, side by side, upon the dew-drenched grass, making the grave-mount their pillow. Obscurely, through the clouded chamber of his brain, passed the image of her poppy-scarlet mouth burning against the whiteness of her skin. All that he could now actually see of her face, in the darkness, was its glimmering pallor, but the feeling of her kiss remained and merged itself in this impression. He lay on his back with closed eyes, and

she bent over him as he lay, and began kissing him again, as if her soul would never be satisfied. In the intervals of her kisses, she pressed her fingers against his forehead, and uttered incoherent and tender whispers. It seemed to her as though, by the very magnetism of her devotion, she *must* be able to restore his shattered wits.

Nor did her efforts seem in vain. After a while the stone-carver lifted himself up and looked round him. He smiled affectionately at Ninsy and patted her, almost playfully, upon the knee.

"You have done me good, child," he said. "You have done me more good than you know. I don't think I shall say any more silly things tonight."

He stood up on his feet, heaved a deep, natural sigh, and stretched himself, as one roused from a long sleep.

"What have you managed to do to me, Ninsy?" he asked. "I feel completely different. Those voices in my head have stopped." He turned tenderly towards her. "I believe you've driven the evil spirit out of me, child," he said.

She flung her arms round him with a gasping cry. "You do like me a little, Jim? Oh my darling, I love you so much! I love you! I love you!" She clung to him with frenzied passion, her breast convulsed with sobs, and the salt tears mingling with her kisses.

Suddenly, as he held her body in his arms, he felt a shuddering tremor run through her, from head to foot. Her head fell back, helpless and heavy, and her whole frame hung limp and passive upon his arm. It almost seemed as though, in exorcising, by

the magnetic power of her love, the demon that possessed him, she had broken her own heart.

Andersen was overwhelmed with alarm and remorse. He laid her gently upon the ground, and chafed the palms of her hands whispering her name and uttering savage appeals to Providence. His appeals, however, remained unanswered, and she lay deadly still, her coils of dusky hair spread loose over the wet grass.

He rose in mute dismay, and stared angrily round the cemetery, as if demanding assistance from its silent population. Then with a glance at her motionless form, he ran quickly to the open gate and shouted loudly for help. His voice echoed hollowly through the walled enclosure, and a startled flutter of wings rose from the distant fir-trees. Somewhere down in the valley, a dog began to bark, but no other answer to his repeated cry reached his ears. He returned to the girl's side.

Frantically he rent open her dress at the throat and tore with trembling fingers at the laces of her bodice. He pressed his hand against her heart. A faint, scarcely discernible tremor under her soft breast reassured him. She was not dead, then! He had not killed her with his madness.

He bent down and made an effort to lift her in his arms, but his limbs trembled beneath him and his muscles collapsed helplessly. The reaction from the tempest in his brain had left him weak as an infant. In this wretched inability to do anything to restore her he burst into a fit of piteous tears, and struck his forehead with his clenched hand.

Once more he tried desperately to lift her, and

once more, fragile as she was, the effort proved hopelessly beyond his strength. Suddenly, out of the darkness beyond the cemetery gate, he heard the sound of voices.

He shouted as loudly as he could and then listened intently, with beating heart. An answering shout responded, in Luke's well-known voice. A moment or two later, and Luke himself, followed by Mr. Quincunx, hurried into the cemetery.

Immediately after Ninsy's departure the recluse had been seized with uncontrollable remorse. Mixed with his remorse was the disturbing consciousness that since Ninsy knew he had advised Andersen to make his way to Seven Ashes, the knowledge was ultimately sure to reach the younger brother's ears. Luke was one of the few intimates Mr. Quincunx possessed in Nevilton. The recluse held him in curious respect as a formidable and effective man of the world. He had an exaggerated notion of his power. He had grown accustomed to his evening visits. He was fond of him and a little afraid of him.

It was therefore an extremely disagreeable thought to his mind, to conceive of Luke as turning upon him with contempt and indignation. Thus impelled, the perturbed solitary had summoned up all his courage and gone boldly down into the village to find the younger Andersen. He had met him at the gate of Mr. Taxater's house.

Left behind in the station field by James and his pursuers, Luke had reverted for a while with the conscious purpose of distracting his mind, to his old preoccupation, and had spent the afternoon in a manner eminently congenial, making love to two

damsels at the same time, and parrying with evasive urbanity their combined recriminations.

At the close of the afternoon, having chatted for an hour with the station-master's wife, and shared their family tea, he had made his way according to his promise, into Mr. Taxater's book-lined study, and there, closely closeted with the papal champion, had smoothed out the final threads of the conspiracy that was to betray Gladys and liberate Lacrima.

Luke had been informed by Mr. Quincunx of every detail of James' movements and of Ninsy's appearance on the scene. The recluse, as the reader may believe, did not spare himself in any point. He even exaggerated his fear of the agitated stone-carver, and as they hastened together towards Seven Ashes, he narrated, down to the smallest particular, the strange conversation they had had in his potato-garden.

"Why do you suppose," he enquired of Luke, as they ascended the final slope of the hill, "he talked so much of someone giving me money? Who, on earth, is likely to give me money? People don't as a rule throw money about, like that, do they? And if they did, I am the last person they would throw it to. I am the sort of person that kind and good people naturally hate. It's because they know I know the deep little vanities and cunning selfishness in their blessed deeds.

"No one in this world really acts from pure motives. We are all grasping after our own gain. We are all pleased when other people come to grief, and sorry when things go well with them. It's human nature, that's what it is! Human nature is always vicious. It was human nature in me that made me send your

brother up this hill, instead of taking him back to the village. It was human nature in you that made you curse me as you did, when I first told you."

Luke did his best to draw Mr. Quincunx back from these general considerations to his conversation with James.

"What did you say," he enquired, "when he asked you about marrying Lacrima, supposing this imaginary kind person were available? Did you tell him you would do it?"

"You mean, was he really jealous?" replied the other, with one of his goblin-like laughs.

"It was a strange question to ask," pursued Luke. "I can't imagine how you answered it."

"Of course," said Mr. Quincunx, "we know very well what he was driving at. He wanted to sound me. Whatever may be wrong with him he was clever enough to want to sound me. We are all like that! We are all going about the world trying to find out each other's weakest points, with the idea that it may be useful to us to know them, so as to be able to stick knives into them when we want to."

"It was certainly rather a strange question considering that he is a bit attracted to Lacrima himself," remarked Luke. "I should think you were very cautious how you answered."

"Cautious?" replied Mr. Quincunx. "I don't believe in caution. Caution is a thing for well-to-do people who have something to lose. I answered him exactly as I would answer anyone. I said I should be a fool not to agree. And so I should. Don't you think so, Andersen? I should be a fool not to marry, under such circumstances?"

"It depends what your feelings are towards Lacrima," answered the wily stone-carver.

"Why do you say that, in that tone?" said the recluse sharply. "You know very well what I feel towards Lacrima. Everyone knows. She is the one little streak of romance that the gods have allowed to cross my path. She is my only girl-friend in Nevilton."

At that moment the two men reached Seven Ashes and the sound of their voices was carried to the cemetery, with the result already narrated.

It will be remarked as an interesting exception to the voluble candour of Mr. Quincunx, that in his conversation with Luke he avoided all mention of Lacrima's fatal contract with Mr. Romer. He had indeed, on an earlier occasion, approached the outskirts of this affair, in an indirect manner and with much manœuvring. From what he had hinted then, Luke had formed certain shrewd surmises, in the direction of the truth, but of the precise facts he remained totally ignorant.

The shout for help which interrupted this discussion gave the two men a shock of complete surprise. They were still more surprised, when on entering the cemetery they found James standing over the apparently lifeless form of Ninsy Lintot, her clothes torn and her hair loose and dishevelled. Their astonishment reached its climax when they noticed the sane and rational way in which the stone-carver addressed them. He was in a state of pitiful agitation, but he was no longer mad.

By dint of their united efforts they carried the girl across the field, and laid her down beneath the ash-

trees. The fresher air of this more exposed spot had an immediate effect upon her. She breathed heavily, and her fingers, under the caress of James' hands, lost their rigidity. Across her shadowy white face a quiver passed, and her head moved a little.

"Ninsy! Ninsy, dear!" murmured Andersen as he knelt by her side. By the light of the clear stars, which now filled the sky with an almost tropical splendour, the three men gazing anxiously at her face saw her eyes slowly open and her lips part in a tender recognitory smile.

"Thank God!" cried James, "You are better now, Ninsy, aren't you? Here is Luke and Mr. Quincunx. They came to find us. They'll help me to get you safe home."

The girl murmured some indistinct and broken phrase. She smiled again, but a pathetic attempt she made to lift her hand to her throat proved her helpless weakness. Tenderly, as a mother might, James anticipated her movement, and restored to as natural order as he could her torn and ruffled dress.

At that moment to the immense relief of the three watchers the sound of cart-wheels became audible. The vehicle proved to be a large empty wagon driven by one of Mr Goring's men on the way back from an outlying hamlet. They all knew the driver, who pulled up at once at their appeal.

On an extemporized couch at the bottom of the wagon, made of the men's coats, — Mr. Quincunx being the first to offer his, — they arranged the girl's passive form as comfortably as the rough vehicle allowed. And then, keeping the horses at a walking-

pace, they proceeded along the lane towards Wild Pine.

For some while, as he walked by the cart's side, his hand upon its well-worn edge, James experienced extreme weariness and lassitude. His legs shook under him and his heart palpitated. The demon which had been driven out of him, had left him, it seemed, like his biblical prototype, exhausted and half-dead. By the time, however, that they reached the corner, where Root-Thatch Lane descends to the village, and Nevil's Gully commences, the cool air of the night and the slow monotonous movement had restored a considerable portion of his strength.

None of the men, as they went along, had felt in a mood for conversation. Luke had spent his time, naming to himself, with his accustomed interest in such phenomena, the various familiar constellations which shone down upon them between the dark boughs of the Scotch-firs.

The thoughts of Mr. Quincunx were confused and strange. He had fallen into one of his self-condemnatory moods, and like a solemn ghost moving by his side, a grim projection of his inmost identity kept rebuking and threatening him. As with most retired persons, whose lives are passed in an uninterrupted routine, the shock of any unusual or unforseen accident fell upon him with a double weight.

He had been much more impressed by the wild agitation of James, and by the sight of Ninsy's unconscious and prostrate figure, than anyone who knew only the cynical side of him would have supposed possible. The cynicism of Mr. Quincunx was indeed strictly confined to philosophical conversation.

In practical life he was wont to encounter any sudden or tragic occurrence with the unsophisticated sensitiveness of a child. As with many other sages, whose philosophical proclivities are rather instinctive than rational, Mr. Quincunx was liable to curious lapses into the most simple and superstitious misgivings.

The influence of their slow and mute advance, under the majestic heavens, may have had something to do with this reaction, but it is certain that this other Mr. Quincunx — this shadowy companion with no cabbage-leaf under his hat — pointed a most accusing finger at him. Before they reached Nevil's Gully, the perturbed recluse had made up his mind that, at all costs, he would intervene to prevent this scandalous union of his friend with John Goring. Contract or no contract, he must exert himself in some definite and overt manner to stave off this outrage.

To his startled conscience the sinister figure of Mr. Romer seemed to extend itself, Colossus-like, from the outstretched neck of Cygnus, the heavenly Swan, to the low-hung brilliance of the "lord-star" Jupiter, and accompanying this Satanic shadow across his vision, was a horrible and most realistic image of the frail Italian, struggling in vain against the brutal advances of Mr. Goring. He seemed to see Lacrima, lying helpless, as Ninsy had been lying, but with no protecting forms grouped reassuringly around her.

The sense of the pitiful helplessness of these girlish beings, thrust by an indifferent fate into the midst of life's brute forces, had pierced his conscience with an indelible stab when first he had seen her prostrate in the cemetery. For a vague transitory moment,

he had wondered then, whether his sending her in pursuit of a madman had resulted in a most lamentable tragedy; and though Andersen's manner had quickly reassured him as it had simultaneously reassured Luke, the original impression of the shock remained.

At that moment, as he helped to lift Ninsy out of the wagon, and carry her through the farm-yard to her father's cottage, the cynical recluse felt an almost quixotic yearning to put himself to any inconvenience and sacrifice any comfort, if only one such soft feminine creature as he supported now in his arms, might be spared the contact of gross and violating hands.

James Andersen, as well as Mr. Quincunx, remained silent during their return towards the village. In vain Luke strove to lift off from them this oppression of pensive and gentle melancholy. Neither his stray bits of astronomical pedantry, nor his Rabelaisean jests at the expense of a couple of rural amorists they stumbled upon in the over-shadowed descent, proved arresting enough to break his companion's silence.

At the bottom of Root-Thatch Lane Mr. Quincunx separated from the brothers. His way led directly through the upper portion of the village to the Yeoborough road, while that of the Andersens passed between the priory and the church.

The clock in St. Catharine's tower was striking ten as the two brothers moved along under the churchyard wall. With the departure of Mr. Quincunx James seemed to recover his normal spirits. This recovery was manifested in a way that rejoiced

the heart of Luke, so congruous was it with all their old habits and associations; but to a stranger overhearing the words, it would have seemed the reverse of promising.

"Shall we take a glance at the grave?" the elder brother suggested, leaning his elbows on the moss-grown wall. Luke assented with alacrity, and the ancient stones of the wall lending themselves easily to such a proceeding, they both clambered over into the place of tombs.

Thus within the space of forty-eight hours the brothers Andersen had been together in no less than three sepulchral enclosures. One might have supposed that the same destiny that made of their father a kind of modern Old Mortality—less pious, it is true, than his prototype, but not less addicted to invasions of the unprotesting dead—had made it inevitable that the most critical moments of his sons' lives should be passed in the presence of these mute witnesses.

They crossed over to where the head-stone of their parents' grave rose, gigantic and imposing in the clear star light, as much larger than the other monuments as the beaver, into which Pau-Puk-Keewis changed himself, was larger than the other beavers. They sat down on a neighbouring mound and contemplated in silence their father's work. The dark dome of the sky above them, strewn with innumerable points of glittering light, attracted Luke once more to his old astronomical speculations.

"I have an idea," he said, "that there is more in the influence of these constellations than even the astrologers have guessed. Their method claims to be

a scientific one, mathematical in the exactness of its inferences. My feeling about the matter is, that there is something much more arbitrary, much more living and wayward, in the manner in which they work their will upon us. I said 'constellations,' but I don't believe, as a matter of fact, that it is from them at all that the influences come. The natural and obvious thing is that the *planets* should affect us, and affect us very much in the same way as we affect one another. The ancient races recognized this difference. The fixed stars are named after animals, or inanimate objects, or after powerful, but not more than human, heroes. The planets are all named from immortal gods, and it is as gods, — as wilful and arbitrary gods — that they influence our destinies."

James Andersen surveyed the large and brilliant star which at that moment hung, like an enormous glow-worm, against the southern slope of Nevilton Mount.

"Some extremely evil planet must have been very active during these last weeks with Lacrima and with me," he remarked. "Don't get alarmed, my dear," he added, noticing the look of apprehension which his brother turned upon him. "I shan't worry you with any more silly talk. Those voices in my head have quite ceased. But that does not help Lacrima." He laughed a sad little laugh.

"I suppose," he added, "no one can help her in this devilish situation, — except that queer fellow who's just left us. I would let him step over my dead body, if he would only carry her off and fool them all!"

Luke's mind plunged into a difficult problem. His brother's wits were certainly restored, and he seemed calm and clear-headed. But was he clear-headed enough to learn the details of the curious little conspiracy which Mr. Taxater's diplomatic brain had evolved? How would this somewhat ambiguous transaction strike so romantic a nature as his?

Luke hesitated and pondered, the tall dark tower of St. Catharine's Church affording him but scant inspiration, as it rose above them into the starlit sky. Should he tell him or should he keep the matter to himself, and enter into some new pretended scheme with his brother, to occupy his mind and distract it, for the time being?

So long did he remain silent, pondering this question, that James, observing his absorbed state and concluding that his subtle intelligence was occupied in devising some way out of their imbroglio, gave up all thought of receiving an answer, and moving to a less dew-drenched resting-place, leaned his head against an upright monument and closed his eyes. The feeling that his admired brother was taking Lacrima's plight so seriously in hand filled him with a reassuring calm, and he had not long remained in his new position before his exhausted senses found relief in sleep.

Left to himself, Luke weighed in his mind every conceivable aspect of the question at stake. Less grave and assured than the metaphysical Mr. Taxater in this matter of striking at evil persons with evil weapons, Luke was not a whit less unscrupulous.

No Quincunx-like visitings of compunction had followed, with him, their rescue of Ninsy. If the scene

at Seven Ashes had printed any impression at all upon his volatile mind, it was merely a vague and agreeable sense of how beautiful the girl's dead-white skin had looked, contrasted with the disturbed masses of her dusky hair. Beyond this, except for a pleasant memory of how lightly and softly she had lain upon his arm, as he helped to carry her across the Wild Pine barton, the occurrence had left him unaffected.

His conscience did not trouble him in the smallest degree with regard to Gladys. According to Luke's philosophy of life, things in this world resolved themselves into a reckless hand-to-hand struggle between opposing personalities, every one of them seeking, with all the faculties at his disposal, to get the better of the others. It was absurd to stop and consider such illusive impediments as sentiment or honour, when the great, casual, indifferent universe which surrounds us knows nothing of these things!

Out of the depths of this chaotic universe he, Luke Andersen, had been flung. It must be his first concern to sweep aside, as irrelevant and meaningless, any mere human fancies, ill-based and adventitious, upon which his free foot might stumble. To strike craftily and boldly in defence of the person he loved best in the world seemed to him not only natural but commendable. How should he be content to indulge in vague sentimental shilly-shallying, when the whole happiness of his beloved Daddy James was at stake?

The difference between Luke's attitude to their mutual conspiracy, and that of Mr. Taxater, lay in the fact that to the latter the whole event was merely part of an elaborate, deeply-involved cam-

paign, whose ramifications extended indefinitely on every side; while to the former the affair was only one of those innumerable chaotic struggles that a whimsical world delighted to evoke.

An inquisitive observer might have wondered what purpose Mr. Taxater had in mixing himself up in the affair at all. This question of his fellow-conspirator's motive crossed, as a matter of fact, Luke's own mind, as his gaze wandered negligently from the Greater to the Lesser Bear, and from Orion to the Pleiades. He came to the characteristic conclusion that it was no quixotic impulse that had impelled this excellent man, but a completely conscious and definite desire — the desire to add yet one more wanderer to his list of converts to the Faith.

Lacrima was an Italian and a Catholic. United to Mr. Quincunx, might she not easily win over that dreamy infidel to the religion of her fathers? Luke smiled to himself as he thought how little the papal champion could have known the real character of the solitary of Dead Man's Lane. Sooner might the sea at Weymouth flow inland, and wash with its waves the foot of Leo's Hill, than this ingrained mystic bow his head under the yoke of dogmatic truth!

After long cogitation with himself, Luke came to the conclusion that it would be wiser, on the whole, to say nothing to his brother of his plan to work out Lacrima's release by means of her cousin's betrayal. Having arrived at this conclusion he rose and stretched himself, and glanced at the sleeping James.

The night was warm and windless, but Luke began to feel anxious lest the cold touch of the stone, upon

which his brother rested, should strike a chill into his blood. At the same time he was extremely loth to disturb so placid and wholesome a slumber. He laid his hand upon the portentous symbol of mortality which crowned so aggressively his parents' monument, and looked round him. His vigil had already been interrupted more than once by the voices of late revellers leaving the Goat and Boy. Such voices still recurred, at intermittent moments, followed by stumbling drunken footsteps, but in the intervals the silence only fell the deeper.

Suddenly he observed, or fancied he observed, the aspect of a figure extremely familiar to him, standing patiently outside the inn door. He hurried across the churchyard and looked over the wall. No, he had not been mistaken. There, running her hands idly through the leaves of the great wistaria which clung to the side of the house, stood his little friend Phyllis. She had evidently been sent by her mother, — as younger maids than she were often sent — to assist, upon their homeward journey, the unsteady steps of Bill Santon the carter.

Luke turned and glanced at his brother. He could distinguish his motionless form, lying as still as ever, beyond the dark shape of his father's formidable tombstone. There was no need to disturb him yet. The morrow was Sunday, and they could therefore be as late as they pleased.

He called softly to the patient watcher. She started violently at hearing his voice, and turning round, peered into the darkness. By degrees she made out his form, and waved her hand to him.

He beckoned her to approach. She shook her head,

and indicated by a gesture that she was expecting the appearance of her father. Once more he called her, making what seemed to her, in the obscurity, a sign that he had something important to communicate. Curiosity overcame piety in the heart of the daughter of Bill Santon and she ran across the road.

"Why, you silly thing!" whispered the crafty Luke, "your father's been gone this half hour! He went a bit of the way home with Sam Lintot. Old Sam will find a nice little surprise waiting for him when he gets back. I reckon he'll send your father home-along sharp enough."

It was Luke's habit, in conversation with the villagers, to drop lightly into many of their provincial phrases, though both he and his brother used, thanks to their mother's training, as good English as any of the gentlefolk of Nevilton.

The influence of association in the matter of language might have afforded endless interesting matter to the student of words, supposing such a one had been able to overhear the conversations of these brothers with their various acquaintances. Poor Ninsy, for instance, fell naturally into the local dialect when she talked to James in her own house; and assumed, with equal facility, her loved one's more colourless manner of speech, when addressing him on ground less familiar to her.

As a matter of fact the universal spread of board-school education in that corner of the country had begun to sap the foundations of the old local peculiarities. Where these survived, in the younger generation, they survived side by side with the newer tricks of speech. The Andersens' girl-friends were, all of

them, in reality, expert bilinguists. They spoke the King's English, and they spoke the Nevilton English, with equal ease, if with unequal expressiveness.

The shrewd fillip to her curiosity, which Luke's reference to Lintot's home-coming had given, allured Phyllis into accepting without protest his audacious invention about her father. The probability of such an occurrence seemed sealed with certainty, when turning, at a sign from her friend, she saw, against the lighted window the burly form of the landlord engaged in closing his shutters. It was not the custom, as Phyllis well knew, of this methodical dispenser of Dionysian joys to "shutter up house," as he called it, until every guest had departed. How could she guess — little deluded maid! — that, stretched upon the floor in the front parlor, stared at by the landlord's three small sons, was the comatose body of her worthy parent breathing like one of Mr. Goring's pigs?

"Tain't no good my waiting here then," she whispered. "What do 'ee mean by Sam Lintot's being surprised-like? Be Ninsy taken with her heart again?"

"Let me help you over here," answered the stonecarver, "that Priory wench was talking, just now, just across yon wall. She'll be hearing what we say if we don't move on a bit."

"Us don't mind what a maid like her do hear, do us, Luke dear?" whispered the girl in answer. "Give me a kiss, sonny, and let me be getting homealong!"

She stood on tiptoe and raised her hands over the

top of the wall. Luke seized her wrists, and retained them in a vicious clutch.

"Put your foot into one of those holes," he said, "and we'll soon have you across."

Unwilling to risk a struggle in such a spot, and not really at all disinclined for an adventure, the girl obeyed him, and after being hoisted up on the wall, was lifted quickly down on the other side, and enclosed in Luke's gratified arms. The amorous stone-carver remembered long afterwards the peculiar thrill of almost chaste pleasure which the first touch of her cold cheeks gave him, as she yielded to his embrace.

"*Is* Nin Lintot bad again?" she enquired, drawing herself away at last.

Luke nodded. "You won't see her about, this week — or next week — or the week after," he said. "She's pretty far gone, this time, I'm afraid."

Phyllis rendered to her acquaintance's misfortune the tribute of a conventional murmur.

"Oh, let's go and look at where they be burying Jimmy Pringle!" she suddenly whispered, in an awe-struck, excited tone.

"What!" cried Luke, "you don't mean to say he's dead, — the old man?"

"Where's 't been to, then, these last days?" she enquired. "He died yesterday morning and they be going to bury him on Monday. 'Twill be a monstrous large funeral. Can't be but you've heard tell of Jimmy's being done for." She added, in an amazed and bewildered tone.

"I've been very busy this last week," said Luke.

"You didn't seem very busy this afternoon, when

you were with Annie and me up at station-field," she exclaimed, with a mischievous little laugh. Then in a changed voice, "Let's go and see where they're going to put him. It's somewhere over there, under South Wall."

They moved cautiously hand in hand between the dark grassy mounds, the heavy dew soaking their shoes.

Suddenly Phyllis stopped, her fingers tightening, and a delicious thrill of excitement quivering through her. "There it is. Look!" she whispered.

They advanced a step or two, and found themselves confronted by a gloomy oblong hole, and an ugly heap of ejected earth.

"Oh, how awful it do look, doesn't it, Luke darling?" she murmured, clinging closely to him.

He put his arm round the girl's waist, and together, under the vast dome of the starlit sky, the two warm-blooded youthful creatures contemplated the resting-place of the generations.

"Its queer to think," remarked Luke pensively, "that just as we stand looking on this, so, when we're dead, other people will stand over our graves, and we know nothing and care nothing!"

"They dug this out this morning," said Phyllis, more concerned with the immediate drama than with general meditations of mortality. "Old Ben Fursling's son did it, and my father helped him in his dinner-hour. They said another hot day like this would make the earth too hard."

Luke moved forward, stepping cautiously over the dark upturned soil. He paused at the extreme edge of the gaping recess.

"What'll you give me," he remarked turning to his companion, "if I climb down into it?"

"Don't talk like that, Luke," protested the girl. "'Tisn't lucky to say them things. I wouldn't give you nothing. I'd run straight away and leave you."

The young man knelt down at the edge of the hole, and with the elegant cane he had carried in his hand all that afternoon, fumbled profanely in its dusky depths. Suddenly, to the girl's absolute horror, he scrambled round, and deliberately let himself down into the pit. She breathed a sigh of unutterable relief, when she observed his head and shoulders still above the level of the ground.

"It's all right," he whispered, "they've left it half-finished. I suppose they'll do the rest on Monday."

"Please get out of it, Luke," the girl pleaded. "I don't like to see you there. It make me think you're standing on Jimmy Pringle."

Luke obeyed her and emerged from the earth almost as rapidly as he had descended.

When he was once more by her side, Phyllis gave a little half-deliberate shudder of exquisite terror. "Fancy," she whispered, clinging tightly to him, "if you was to drag me to that hole, and put me down there! I think I should die of fright."

This conscious playing with her own girlish fears was a very interesting characteristic in Phyllis Santon. Luke had recognized something of the sort in her before, and now he wondered vaguely, as he glanced from the obscurity of Nevilton Churchyard to the brilliant galaxy of luminous splendour surround-

ing the constellation Pegasus, whether she really wanted him to take her at her word.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of voices at the inn-door. They both held their breath, listening intently.

"There's father!" murmured the girl. "He must have come back from Lintot's and be trying to get into the public again! Come and help me over the wall, Luke darling. Only don't let anybody see us."

As they hurried across the enclosure, Phyllis whispered in his ears a remark that seemed to him either curiously irrelevant, or inspired in an occult manner by psychic telepathy. She had lately refrained from any reference to Lacrima. The Italian's friendliness to her under the Hullaway elms had made her reticent upon this subject. On this occasion, however, though quite ignorant of James' presence in the churchyard, she suddenly felt compelled to say to Luke, in an intensely serious voice:

"If some of you clever ones don't stop that marriage of Master Goring, there'll be some more holes dug in this place! There be some things what them above never will allow."

He helped her over the wall, and watched her overtake her staggering parent, who had already reeled some distance down the road. Then he returned to his brother and roused him from his sleep. James was sulky and irritable at being so brusquely restored to consciousness, but the temperature of his mind appeared as normal and natural as ever.

They quitted the place without further conversation, and strode off in silence up the village street. The perpendicular slabs of the crowded head stones,

and the yet more numerous mounds that had neither name nor memory, resumed their taciturn and lonely watch.

To no human eyes could be made visible the poor thin shade that was once Jimmy Pringle, as it swept, bat-like, backwards and forwards, across the dew-drenched grass. But the shade itself, endowed with more perception than had been permitted to it while imprisoned in the "muddy vesture" of our flesh and blood, became aware, in its troubled flight, of a singular spiritual occurrence.

Rising from the base of that skull-crowned monument, two strange and mournful phantoms flitted waveringly, like huge ghost-moths, along the protruding edge of the church-roof. Two desolate and querulous voices, like the voices of conflicting winds through the reeds of some forlorn salt-marsh, quivered across the listening fields.

"It is strong and unconquered — the great heart of my Hill," one voice wailed out. "It draws them. It drives them. The earth is with it; the planets are for it, and all their enchantments cannot prevail against it!"

"The leaves may fall and the trees decay," moaned the second voice, "but where the sap has once flowed, Love must triumph."

The fluttering shadow of Jimmy Pringle fled in terror from these strange sounds, and took refuge among the owls in the great sycamore of the Priory meadow. A falling meteorite swept downwards from the upper spaces of the sky and lost itself behind the Wild Pine ridge.

"Strength and cunning," the first voice wailed

forth again, "alone possess their heart's desire. All else is vain and empty."

"Love and Sacrifice," retorted the other, "outlast all victories. Beyond the circle of life they rule the darkness, and death is dust beneath their feet."

Crouched on a branch of his protecting sycamore, the thin wraith of Jimmy Pringle trembled and shook like an aspen-leaf. A dumb surprise possessed the poor transmuted thing to find itself even less assured of palpable and familiar salvation, than when, after drinking cider at the Boar's Head in Athelston, he had dreamed dreams at Captain Whiffley's gate.

"The Sun is lord and god of the earth," wailed the first voice once more. "The Sun alone is master in the end. Lust and Power go forth with him, and all flesh obeys his command."

"The Moon draws more than the tides," answered the second voice. "In the places of silence where Love waits, only the Moon can pass; and only the Moon can hear the voice of the watchers."

From the red planet, high up against the church-tower, to the silver planet low down among the shadowy trees, the starlit spaces listened mutely to these antiphonal invocations. Only the distant expanse of the Milky Way, too remote in its translunar gulfs to heed these planetary conflicts, shimmered haughtily down upon the Wood and Stone of Nevilton — impassive, indifferent, unconcerned.

CHAPTER XX

VOX POPULI

JAMES ANDERSEN'S mental state did not fall away from the restored equilibrium into which the unexpected intervention of Ninsy Lintot had magnetized and medicined him. He went about his work as usual, gloomier and more taciturn, perhaps, than before, but otherwise with no deviation from his normal condition.

Luke noticed that he avoided all mention of Lacrima, and, as far as the younger brother knew, made no effort to see her. Luke himself received, two days after the incident in the Methodist cemetery, a somewhat enigmatic letter from Mr. Taxater. This letter bore a London post-mark and informed the stone-carver that after a careful consideration of the whole matter, and an interview with Lacrima, the writer had come to the conclusion that no good purpose would be served by carrying their plan into execution. Mr. Taxater had, accordingly, so the missive declared, destroyed the incriminating document which he had induced Luke to sign, and had relinquished all thought of an interview with Mr. Dangelis.

The letter concluded by congratulating Luke on his brother's recovery — of which, it appeared, the diplomatist had been informed by the omniscient Mrs. Watnot — and assuring him that if ever, in any way, he, the writer, could be of service to either of the

two brothers, they could count on his unfailing regard. An obscure post-script, added in pencil in a very minute and delicate hand, indicated that the interview with Lacrima, referred to above, had confirmed the theologian in a suspicion that hitherto he had scrupulously concealed, namely, that their concern with regard to the Italian's position was less called for than appearances had led them to suppose.

After reading and weighing this last intimation, before he tore up the letter into small fragments, the cynical Luke came to the conclusion that the devoted champion of the papacy had found out that his co-religionist had fallen from grace; in other words, that Lacrima Traffio was no longer a Catholic. It could hardly be expected, the astute youth argued, that Mr. Taxater should throw himself into a difficult and troublesome intrigue in order that an apostate from the inviolable Faith, once for all delivered to the Saints, should escape what might reasonably be regarded as a punishment for her apostacy.

The theologian's post-script appeared to hint that the girl was not, after all, so very unwilling, in this matter of her approaching marriage. Luke, in so far as he gave such an aspect of the affair any particular thought, discounted this plausible suggestion as a mere conscience-quieting salve, introduced by the writer to smooth over the true cause of his reaction.

For his own part it had been always of James and not of Lacrima he had thought, and since James had now been restored to his normal state, the question of the Italian's moods and feelings affected him very little. He was still prepared to discuss with his

brother any new chance of intervention that might offer itself at the last moment. He desired James' peace of mind before everything else, but in his heart of hearts he had considerable doubt whether the mood of self-effacing magnanimity which had led his brother to contemplate Lacrima's elopement with Mr. Quincunx, would long survive the return of his more normal temper. Were he in James' position, he told himself grimly, he should have much preferred that the girl should marry a man she hated rather than one she loved, as in such a case the field would be left more open for any future "rapprochement."

Thus it came about that the luckless Pariah, by the simple accident of her inability to hold fast to her religion, lost at the critical moment in her life the support of the one friendly power, that seemed capable, in that confusion of opposed forces, of bringing to her aid temporal as well as spiritual, pressure. She was indeed a prisoner by the waters of Babylon, but her forgetfulness of Sion had cut her off from the assistance of the armies of the Lord.

The days passed on rapidly now, over the heads of the various persons involved in our narrative. For James and Lacrima, and in a measure for Mr. Quincunx, too, — since it must be confessed that the shock of Ninsy's collapse had not resulted in any permanent tightening of the recluse's moral fibre, — they passed with that treacherous and oblivious smoothness which dangerous waters are only too apt to wear, when on the very verge of the cataract.

In the stir and excitement of the great political struggle which now swept furiously from one end of

the country to the other, the personal fortunes of a group of tragically involved individuals, in a small Somersetshire village, seemed to lose, for all except those most immediately concerned, every sort of emphasis and interest.

The polling day at last arrived, and a considerable proportion of the inhabitants of Nevilton, both men and women, found themselves, as the end of the fatal hours approached, wedged and hustled, in a state of distressing and exhausted suspense, in the densely crowded High Street in front of the Yeoborough Town Hall.

Mr. Clavering himself was there, and in no very amiable temper. Perverse destiny had caused him to be helplessly surrounded by a noisy high-spirited crew of Yeoborough factory-girls, to whom the event in progress was chiefly interesting, in so far as it afforded them an opportunity to indulge in uproarious chaff and to throw insulting or amorous challenges to various dandified youths of their acquaintance, whom they caught sight of in the confusion. Mr. Clavering's ill-temper reached its climax when he became aware that a good deal of the free and indiscreet badinage of his companions was addressed to none other than his troublesome parishioner, Luke Andersen, whose curly head, surmounted by an aggressively new straw hat, made itself visible not far off.

The mood of the vicar of Nevilton during the last few weeks had been one of accumulative annoyance. Everything had gone wrong with him, and it was only by an immense effort of his will that he had succeeded in getting through his ordinary pastoral

labour, without betraying the unsettled state of his mind and soul.

He could not, do what he might, get Gladys out of his thoughts for one single hour of the day. She had been especially soft and caressing, of late, in her manner towards him. More submissive than of old to his spiritual admonitions, she had dropped her light and teasing ways, and had assumed, in her recent lessons with him, an air of pliable wistfulness, composed of long, timidly interrupted glances from her languid blue eyes, and little low-voiced murmurs of assent from her sweetly-parted lips.

It was in vain that the poor priest struggled against this obsession. The girl was as merciless as she was subtle in the devices she employed to make sure of her hold upon him. She would lead him on, by hesitating and innocent questions, to expound some difficult matter of faith; and then, just as he was launched out upon a high, pure stream of mystical interpretation, she would bring his thoughts back to herself and her deadly beauty, by some irresistible feminine trick, which reduced all his noble speculations to so much empty air.

Ever since that night when he had trembled so helplessly under the touch of her soft fingers beneath the cedars of the South Drive, she had sought opportunities for evoking similar situations. She would prolong the clasp of her hand when they bade one another good night, knowing well how this apparently natural and unconscious act would recur in throbs of adder's poison through the priest's veins, long after the sun had set behind St. Catharine's tower.

She loved sometimes to tantalize and trouble him

by relating incidents which brought herself and her American fiancé into close association in his mind. She would wistfully confide to him, for example, how sometimes she grew weary of love-making, begging him to tell her whether, after all, she were wise in risking the adventure of marriage.

By these arts, and others that it were tedious to enumerate, the girl gradually reduced the unfortunate clergyman to a condition of abject slavery. The worst of it was that, though his release from her constant presence was rapidly approaching—with the near date of the ceremonies for which he was preparing her—instead of being able to rejoice in this, he found himself dreading it with every nerve of his harassed senses.

Clavering had felt himself compelled, on more than one occasion, to allude to the project of Lacrima's marriage, but his knowledge of the Italian's character was so slight that Gladys had little difficulty in making him believe, or at least persuade himself he believed, that no undue pressure was being put upon her.

It was of Lacrima that he suddenly found himself thinking as, hustled and squeezed between two obstreperous factory-girls, he watched the serene and self-possessed Luke enjoying with detached amusement the vivid confusion round him. The fantastic idea came into his head, that in some sort of way Luke was responsible for those sinister rumours regarding the Italian's position in Nevilton, which had thrust themselves upon his ears as he moved to and fro among the villagers.

He had learnt of the elder Andersen's recovery from

Mrs. Fringe, but even that wise lady had not been able to associate this event with the serious illness of Ninsy Lintot, to whose bed-side the young clergyman had been summoned more than once during the last week.

Clavering felt an impulse of unmitigated hatred for the equable stone-carver as he watched him bandying jests with this or the other person in the crowd, and yet so obviously holding himself apart from it all, and regarding the whole scene as if it only existed for his amusement.

A sudden rush of some extreme partisans of the popular cause, making a furious attempt to overpower the persistent taunts of a group of young farmers who stood above them on a raised portion of the pavement, drove a wedge of struggling humanity into the midst of the crowd who surrounded the irritable priest. Clavering was pushed, in spite of his efforts to extricate himself, nearer and nearer to his detested rival, and at last, in the most grotesque and annoying manner possible, he found himself driven point-blank into the stone-carver's very arms. Luke smiled, with what seemed to the heated and flustered priest the last limit of deliberate impertinence.

But there was no help for it. Clavering was forced to accept his proferred hand, and return, with a measure of courtesy, his nonchalant greeting. Squeezed close together—for the crowd had concentrated itself now into an immoveable mass—the fortunate and the unfortunate lover of Gladys Romer listened, side by side, to the deafening shouts, which, first from one party and then from the other, heralded

the appearance of the opposing candidates upon the balcony above.

"I really hardly know," said Luke, in a loud whisper, "which side you are on. I suppose on the Conservative? These radicals are all Nonconformists, and only waiting for a chance of pulling the Church down."

"Thank you," retorted the priest raising his voice so as to contend against the hubbub about them. "I happen to be a radical myself. My own hope is that the Church *will* be pulled down. The Church I believe in cannot be touched. Its foundations are too deep."

"Three cheers for Romer and the Empire!" roared a voice behind them.

"Wone and the People! Wone and the workingman!" vociferated another.

"You'll be holding your confirmation soon, I understand," murmured Luke in his companion's ear, as a swaying movement in the crowd squeezed them even more closely together.

Hugh Clavering realized for the first time in his life what murderers feel the second before they strike their blow. He could have willingly planted his heel at that moment upon the stone-carver's face. Surely the man was intentionally provoking him. He must know — he could not help knowing — the agitation in his nerves.

"Romer and Order! Romer and Sound Finance!" roared one portion of the mob.

"Wone and Liberty! Wone and Justice!" yelled the opposing section.

"I love a scene like this," whispered Luke.

"Doesn't it make you beautifully aware of the contemptible littleness of the human race?"

"I am not only a radical," retorted Clavering, "but I happen also to be a human being, and one who can't take so airy a view of an occasion of this kind. The enthusiasm of these people doesn't at all amuse me. I sympathize with it."

The stone-carver was not abashed by this rebuke. "A matter of taste," he said, "a matter of taste." Then, freeing his arm which had got uncomfortably wedged against his side, and pushing back his hat, "I love to associate these outbursts of popular feeling with the movements of the planets. Tonight, you know, one ought to be able to see —"

Clavering could no longer contain himself. "Damn your planets!" he cried, in a tone so loud, that an old lady in their neighbourhood ejaculated, "Hush! hush!" and looked round indignantly.

"I beg your pardon," muttered the priest, a little ashamed. "What I mean is, I am most seriously concerned about this contest. I pray devoutly Wone will win. It'll be a genuine triumph for the working classes if he does."

"Romer and the Empire!" interpolated the thunderous voice behind them.

"I don't care much for the man himself," he went on, "but this thing goes beyond personalities."

"I'm all for Romer myself," said Luke. "I have the best of reasons for being grateful to him, though he is my employer."

"What do you mean? What reasons?" cried Clavering sharply, once more beginning to feel the most unchristian hatred for this urbane youth.

"Oh, I'm sure I needn't tell you that, sir," responded Luke; "I'm sure you know well enough how much I admire our Nevilton beauty."

Gladys' unhappy lover choked with rage. He had never in his life loathed anything so much as he loathed the way Luke's yellow curls grew on his forehead. His fingers clutched convulsively the palms of his hands. He would like to have seized that crop of hair and beaten the man's head against the pavement.

"I think it's abominable," he cried, "this forcing of Miss Traffio to marry Goring. For a very little, I'd write to the bishop about it and refuse to marry them."

The causes that led to this unexpected and irrelevant outburst were of profound subtlety. Clavering forgot, in his desire to make his rival responsible for every tragedy in the place, that he had himself resolved to discount, as mere village gossip, all the dark rumours he had heard. The blind anger which plunged him into this particular outcry, sprang, in reality, from the bitterness of his own conscience-stricken misgivings.

"I don't think you will," remarked Luke, lowering his voice to a whisper, though the uproar about them rendered such a precaution quite unnecessary. "It is not as a rule a good thing to interfere in these matters. Miss Gladys has told me herself that the whole thing is an invention of Romer's enemies, probably of this fellow Wone."

"She's told me the same story," burst out the priest, "but how am I to believe her?"

A person unacquainted with the labyrinthine con-

volutions of the human mind would have been staggered at hearing the infatuated slave thus betray his suspicion of his enchantress, and to his own rival; but the man's long-troubled conscience, driven by blind anger, rendered him almost beside himself.

"To tell you the truth," said Luke, "I think neither you nor I have anything to do with this affair. You might as well agitate yourself about Miss Romer's marriage with Dangelis! Girls must manage these little problems for themselves. After all, it doesn't really matter much, one way or the other. What they want, is to be married. The person they choose is quite a secondary thing. We have to learn to regard all these little incidents as of but small importance, my good sir, as our world sweeps round the sun!"

"The sun — the sun!" cried Clavering, with difficulty restraining himself. "What has the sun to do with it? You are too fond of bringing in your suns and your planets, Andersen. This trick of yours of shelving the difficulties of life, by pretending you're somehow superior to them all, is a habit I advise you to give up! It's cheap. It's vulgar. It grows tiresome after a time."

Luke's only reply to this was a sweet smile; and the two were wedged so closely together that the priest was compelled to notice the abnormal whiteness and regularity of the young man's teeth.

"I confess to you," continued Luke, with an air of unruffled detachment, as if they had been discussing the tint of a flower or the marks upon a butterfly's wing, "I have often wondered what the

relations really are between Mr. Romer and Miss Traffio; but that is the sort of question which, as Sir Thomas Browne would say, lends itself to a wide solution."

"Romer and Prosperity!" "Wone and Justice!" yelled the opposing factions.

"Our pretty Gladys' dear parent," continued the incorrigible youth, completely disregarding the fact that his companion, speechless with indignation, was desperately endeavouring to extricate himself from the press, 'seems born under a particularly lucky star. I notice that every attempt which people make to thwart him comes to nothing. That's what I admire about him: he seems to move forward to his end like an inexorable fate."

"Rubbish!" ejaculated the priest, turning his angry face once more towards his provoking rival. "Fiddlesticks and rubbish! The man is a man, like the rest of us. I only pray Heaven he's going to lose this election!"

"Under a lucky star," reiterated the stone-carver. "I wish I knew," he added pensively, "what his star is. Probably Jupiter!"

"Wone and Liberty!" "Wone and the Rights of the People!" roared the crowd.

"Wone and God's Vengeance!" answered, in an indescribably bitter tone, a new and different voice. Luke pressed his companion's arm.

"Did you hear that?" he whispered eagerly. "That's Philip. Who would have thought he'd have been here? He's an anarchist, you know."

Clavering, who was taller than his companion, caught sight of the candidate's son. Philip's coun-

tenance was livid with excitement, and his arms were raised as if actually invoking the Heavens.

"Silly fool! muttered Luke. "He talks of God as glibly as any of his father's idiotic friends. But perhaps he was mocking! I thought I detected a tang of irony in his tone."

"Most of you unbelievers cry upon God when the real crisis comes," remarked the priest. "But I like Philip Wone. I respect him. He, at least, takes his convictions seriously."

"I believe you fancy in your heart that some miracle is going to be worked, to punish my worthy employer," observed Luke. "But I assure you, you're mistaken. In this world the only way our Mr. Romers are brought low is by being out-matched on their own ground. He has a lucky star; but other people" — this was added in a low, significant tone — "other people may possibly have stars still more lucky."

At this moment the cheering and shouting became deafening. Some new and important event had evidently occurred. Both men turned and glanced up at the stucco-fronted edifice that served Yeoborough as a city-hall. The balcony had become so crowded that it was difficult to distinguish individual figures; but there was a general movement there, and people were talking and gesticulating eagerly. Presently all these excited persons fell simultaneously into silence, and an attitude of intense expectation. The crowd below caught the thrill of their expectancy, and with upturned faces and eager eyes, waited the event. There was a most formidable hush over the whole sea of human heads; and even the detached Luke

felt his heart beating in tune to the general tension.

In the midst of this impressive silence the burly figure of the sheriff of the parliamentary district made his way slowly to the front of the balcony. With him came the two candidates, each accompanied by a lady, and grouped themselves on either side of him. The sheriff standing erect, with a sheet of paper in his hand, saluted the assembled people, and proceeded to announce, in simple stentorian words, the result of the poll.

Clavering had been stricken dumb with amazement to observe that the lady by Mr. Romer's side was not Mrs. Romer, as he had thoughtlessly assumed it would be, but Gladys herself, exquisitely dressed, and looking, in her high spirits and excitement, more lovely than he had ever seen her.

Her fair hair, drawn back from her head beneath a shady Gainsborough hat, shone like gold in the sunshine. Her cheeks were flushed, and their delicate rose-bloom threw into beautiful relief the pallor of her brow and neck. Her tall girlish figure looked soft and arresting amid the black-coated politicians who surrounded her. Her eyes were brilliant.

Contrasted with this splendid apparition at Mr. Romer's side, the faded primness of the good spouse of the Christian Candidate seemed pathetic and grotesque. Mrs. Wone, in her stiff black dress and old-fashioned hat, looked as though she were attending a funeral. Nor was the appearance of her husband much more impressive or imposing.

Mr. Romer, with his beautiful daughter's hand upon his arm, looked as noble a specimen of sage

authority and massive triumph, as any of that assembled crowd were likely to see in a life-time. A spasmodic burst of cheering was interrupted by vigorous hisses and cries of "Hush! hush! Let the gentleman speak!"

Lifting his hand with an appropriate air of grave solemnity, the sheriff proceeded to read: "Result of the Election in this Parliamentary Division — Mr. George Wone, seven thousand one hundred and fifty nine! Mr. Mortimer Romer, nine thousand eight hundred and sixty-one! I therefore declare Mr. Mortimer Romer duly elected."

A burst of incredible cheering followed this proclamation, in the midst of which the groans and hisses of the defeated section were completely drowned. The cheering was so tremendous and the noisy reaction after the hours of expectancy so immense, that it was difficult to catch a word of what either the successful or the unsuccessful candidate said, as they made their accustomed valedictory speeches.

Clavering and Luke were swept far apart from one another in the mad confusion; and it was well for them both, perhaps, that they were; for before the speeches were over, or the persons on the balcony had disappeared into the building, a very strange and disconcerting event took place.

The unfortunate young Philip, who had received the announcement of his father's defeat as a man might receive a death-sentence, burst into a piercing and resounding cry, which was clearly audible, not only to those immediately about him, but to every one of the ladies and gentlemen assembled on the balcony. There is no need to repeat in this place

the words which the unhappy young man hurled at Mr. Romer and his daughter. Suffice it to say that they were astounding in their brutality and grossness.

As soon as he had uttered them, Philip sank down upon the ground, in the miserable convulsions of some species of epileptic fit. The tragic anxiety of poor Mrs. Wone, who had not only heard his words, but seen his collapse, broke up the balcony party in disorder.

Such is human nature, that though not one of the aristocratic personages there assembled, believed for a moment that Philip was anything but a madman; still, the mere weight of such ominous words, though flung at random and by one out of his senses, had an appreciable effect upon them. It was noticed that one after another they drew away from the two persons thus challenged; and this, combined with the movement about the agitated Mrs. Wone, soon left the father and daughter, the girl clinging to her parent's arm, completely isolated.

Before he led Gladys away, however, Mr. Romer turned a calm and apparently unruffled face upon the scene below. Luke, who, it may be well believed, had missed nothing of the subtler aspects of the situation, was so moved by the man's imperturbable serenity that he caught himself on the point of raising an admiring and congratulatory shout. He stopped himself in time, however; and in place of acclaiming the father, did all he could to catch the eye of the daughter.

In this he was unsuccessful; for the attention of Gladys, during the brief moment in which she followed Mr. Romer's glance over the heads of the

people, was fixed upon the group of persons who surrounded the prostrate Philip. Among these persons Luke now recognized, and doubtless the girl had recognized too, the figure of the vicar of Nevilton.

Luke apostrophized his rival with an ejaculation of mild contempt. "A good man, that poor priest," he muttered, "but a most unmitigated fool! As to Romer, I commend him! But I think I've put a spoke in the wheel of his good fortune, all the same, in spite of the planet Jupiter!"

CHAPTER XXI

CAESAR'S QUARRY

MR. ROMER'S victory in the election was attended by a complete lull in the political world of Nevilton. Nothing but an unavoidable and drastic crisis, among the ruling circles of the country, could have precipitated this formidable struggle in the middle of the holiday-time; and as soon as the contest was over, the general relaxation of the season made itself doubly felt.

This lull in the political arena seemed to extend itself into the sphere of private and individual emotion, in so far as the persons of our drama were concerned. The triumphant quarry-owner rested from his labors under the pleasant warmth of the drowsy August skies; and as, in the old Homeric Olympus, a relapse into lethargy of the wielder of thunder-bolts was attended by a cessation of earthly strife, so in the Nevilton world, the elements of discord and opposition fell, during this siesta of the master of Leo's Hill, into a state of quiescent inertia.

But though the gods might sleep, and the people might relax and play, the watchful unwearied fates spun on, steadily and in silence, their ineluctable threads.

The long process of "carrying the corn" was over at last, and night by night the magic-burdened

moon grew larger and redder above the misty stubble-fields.

The time drew near for the reception of the successful candidate's daughter into the historic church of the country over which he was now one of the accredited rulers. A few more drowsy sunshine-drugged days remained to pass, and the baptism of Gladys — followed, a week later, by the formal imposition of episcopal hands — would be the signal for the departure of August and the beginning of the fall of the leaves.

The end of the second week in September had been selected for the double marriage, partly because it synchronized with the annual parish feast-day, and partly because it supplied Ralph Dangelis with an excuse for carrying off his bride incontinently to New York by one of his favourite boats.

Under the quiet surface of this steadily flowing flood of destiny, which seemed, just then, to be casting a drowning narcotic spell upon all concerned, certain deep and terrible misgivings troubled not a few hearts.

It may be frequently noticed by those whose interest it is to watch the strange occult harmonies between the smallest human dramas and their elemental accomplices, that at these peculiar seasons when Nature seems to pause and draw in her breath, men and women find it hard to use or assert their normal powers of resistance. The planetary influences seem nearer earth than usual; — nearer, with the apparent nearness of the full tide-drawing moon and the heavy scorching sun; — and for those more sensitive souls, whose nerves are easily played upon, there

is produced a certain curious sense of lying back upon fate, with arms helplessly outspread, and wills benumbed and passive.

But though some such condition as this had narcotized all overt resistance to the destiny in store for her in the heart of Lacrima, it cannot be said that the Italian's mind was free from an appalling shadow. Whether by reason of a remote spark of humanity in him, or out of subtle fear lest by any false move he should lose his prey, or because of some diplomatic and sagacious advice received from his brother-in-law, Mr. John Goring had, so far, conducted himself extremely wisely towards his prospective wife, leaving her entirely untroubled by any molestations, and never even seeing her except in the presence of other people. How far this unwonted restraint was agreeable to the nature of the farmer, was a secret concealed from all, except perhaps from his idiot protégé, the only human being in Nevilton to whom the unattractive man ever confided his thoughts.

Lacrima had one small and incidental consolation in feeling that she had been instrumental in sending to a home for the feeble-minded, the unfortunate child of the gamekeeper of Auber Lake. In this single particular, Gladys had behaved exceptionally well, and the news that came of the girl's steady progress in the direction of sanity and happiness afforded some fitful gleam of light in the obscurity that surrounded the Pariah's soul.

The nature of this intermittent gleam, its deep mysterious strength drawn from spiritual sources, helped to throw a certain sad and pallid twilight

over her ordained sacrifice. This also she felt was undertaken, like her visit to Auber Lake, for the sake of an imprisoned and fettered spirit. If by means of such self-immolation her friend of Dead Man's Lane would be liberated from his servitude and set permanently upon his feet, her submission would not be in vain.

She had come once more to feel as though the impending event were, as far as she was concerned, a sort of final death-sentence. The passing fantasy, that in a momentary distortion of her mind had swept over her of the new life it might mean to have children of her own, even though born of this unnatural union, had not approached again the troubled margin of her spirit.

Even the idea of escaping the Romers was only vaguely present. She would escape more than the Romers; she would escape the whole miserable coil of this wretched existence, if the death she anticipated fell upon her; for death, and nothing less than death, seemed the inevitable circumference of the iron circle that was narrowing in upon her.

Had those two strange phantoms that we have seen hovering over Nevilton churchyard, representing in their opposite ways the spiritual powers of the place, been able to survey — as who could deny they might be able? — the fatal stream which was now bearing the Pariah forward to the precipice, they would have been, in their divers tempers, struck with delight and consternation at the spectacle presented to them. There was more in this spectacle, it must be admitted, to bring joy into the heart of a goblin than into that of an angel. Coincidence,

casualty, destiny — all seemed working together to effect the unfortunate girl's destruction.

The fact that, by the recovery of his brother, the astute Luke Andersen, the only one of all the Nevilton circle capable of striking an effective blow in her defence, had been deprived of all but a very shadowy interest in what befell, seemed an especially sinister accident. Equally unfortunate was the luckless chance that at this critical movement had led the diplomatic Mr. Taxater to see fit to prolong his stay in London. Mr. Quincunx was characteristically helpless. James Andersen seemed, since the recovery of his normal mind, to have subsided like a person under some restraining vow. Lacrima was a little surprised that he made no attempt to see her or to communicate with her. She could only suppose she had indelibly hurt him, by her rejection of his quixotic offers, on their way back from Hullaway.

Thus to any ordinary glance, cast upon the field of events as they were now arranging themselves, it would have looked as though the Italian's escape from the fate hanging over her were as improbable as it would be for a miracle to intervene to save her.

In spite of the wild threat flung out by Mr. Clavering in his sudden anger as he waited with Luke in the Yeoborough street, the vicar of Nevilton made no attempt to interfere. Whether he really managed to persuade his conscience that all was well, or whether he came to the conclusion that without some initiative from the Italian it would be useless to meddle, not the most subtle psychologist could say. The fact remained that the only step he took in the matter was to assure himself that the girl's nominal Catholi-

cism had so far lapsed into indifference, that she was likely to raise no objection to a ceremony according to Anglican ritual.

The whole pitiful situation, indeed, offered only one more terrible and branding indictment, against the supine passivity of average human nature in the presence of unspeakable wrongs. The power and authority of the domestic system, according to which the real battle-field of wills takes place out of sight of the public eye, renders it possible for this inertia of the ordinary human crowd to cloak itself under a moral dread of scandal, and under the fear of any drastic breach of the uniformity of social usage.

A visitor from Mars or Saturn might have supposed, that in circumstances of this kind, every decent-thinking person in the village would have rushed headlong to the episcopal throne, and called loudly for spiritual mandates to stop the outrage. Where was the delegated Power of God — so the forlorn shadows of the long-evicted Cistercians might be imagined crying — whose absolute authority could be appealed to in face of every worldly force? What was the tender-souled St. Catharine doing, in her Paradisiac rest, that she could remain so passively indifferent to such monstrous and sacrilegious use of her sacred building? Was it that such transactions as this, should be carried through, under its very shelter, that the gentle spirits who guarded the Holy Rood had made of Nevilton Mount their sacred resting-place? Must the whole fair tradition of the spot remain dull, dormant, dumb, while the devotees of tyranny worked their arbitrary will — "and nothing said"?

Such imaginary appeals, so fantastic in the utterance, were indeed, as that large August-moon rose night by night upon the stubble-fields, far too remote from Nevilton's common routine to enter the heads of any of that simple flock. The morning mists that diffused themselves, like filmy dream-figures, over the watchful promontory of Leo's Hill, were as capable as any of these villagers of crying aloud that wrong was being done.

The loneliness in the midst of which Lacrima moved on her way — groping, as her enemy had taunted her with doing, so helplessly with her wistful hands — was a loneliness so absolute that it sometimes seemed to her as if she were already literally dead and buried. Now and then, with a pallid phosphorescent glimmer like the gleam of a corpse-light, the mortal dissolution of all the ties that bound her to earthly interests, itself threw a fitful illumination over her consciousness.

But Mr. Romer had over-reached himself in his main purpose. The moral disintegration which he looked for, and which the cynical apathy of Mr. Quincunx encouraged, had, by extending itself to every nerve of her spirit, rounded itself off, as it were, full circle, and left her in a mental state rather beyond both good and evil, than delivered up to the latter as opposed to the former. The infernal power might be said to have triumphed; but it could scarcely be said to have triumphed over a living soul. It had rather driven her soul far off, far away from all these contests, into some mysterious translunar region, where all these distinctions lapsed and merged.

Leo's Hill itself had never crouched in more taciturn intentness than it did under that sweltering August sunshine, which seemed to desire, in the gradual scorching of the green slopes, to reduce even the outward skin of the monster to an approximate conformity with its tawny entrails.

Mr. Taxater's departure from the scene at this juncture was not only, little as she knew it, a loss of support to Lacrima, it was also a very serious blow to Vennie Seldom.

The priest in Yeoborough, who at her repeated request had already begun to give her surreptitious lessons in the Faith, was not in any sense fitted to be a young neophyte's spiritual adviser. He was fat. He was gross. He was lethargic. He was indifferent. He also absolutely refused to receive her into the Church without her mother's sanction. This refusal was especially troublesome to Vennie. She knew enough of her mother to know that while it was her nature to resist blindly and obstinately any deviation from her will, when once a revolt was an established fact she would resign herself to it with a surprising equanimity. To ask Valentia for permission to be received into the Church would mean a most violent and distressing scene. To announce to her that she had been so received, would mean nothing but melancholy and weary acquiesence.

She felt deeply hurt at Mr. Taxater's desertion of her at this moment of all moments. It was incredible that it was really necessary for him to be so long in town. As a rule he never left the Gables during the month of August. His conduct puzzled and troubled her. Did he care nothing whether she

became a Catholic or not? Were his lessons mere casual by-play, to fill up his spare hours in an interesting and pleasant diversion? Was he really the faithful friend he called himself? Not only had he absented himself, but he had done so without sending her a single word.

As a matter of fact it was extremely rare for Mr. Taxater to write a letter, even to his nearest friends, except under the stress of theological controversy. But Vennie knew nothing of this. She simply felt hurt and injured; as though the one human being, upon whom she had reposed her trust, had deserted and betrayed her. He had spoken so tenderly, so affectionately to her, too, during their last walk together, before the unfortunate encounter with James Andersen in the Athelston porch!

It is true that his attitude over that matter of Andersen's insanity, and also in the affair of Lacrima's marriage, had a little shocked and disconcerted her. He had bluntly refused to take her into his confidence, and she felt instinctively that the conversation with Luke, from which she had been so curtly dismissed, was of a kind that would have hurt and surprised her.

It seemed unworthy of him to absent himself from Nevilton, just at the moment when, as she felt certain in her heart, some grievous outrage was being committed. She had learned quickly enough of Andersen's recovery; but nothing she could learn either lessened her terrible apprehension about Lacrima, or gave her the least hint of a path she could follow to do anything on the Italian's behalf.

She made a struggle once to see the girl and to talk to her. But she came away from the hurried

interview as perplexed and troubled in her mind as ever. Lacrima had maintained an obstinate and impenetrable reserve. Vennie made up her mind that she would postpone for the present her own religious revolt, and devote herself to keeping a close and careful watch upon events in Nevilton.

Mr. Clavering's present attitude rendered her profoundly unhappy. The pathetic overtures she had made to him recently, with a desperate hope of renewing their friendship on a basis that would be unaffected even by her change of creed, had seemed entirely unremarked by the absorbed clergyman. She could not help brooding sometimes, with a feeling of wretched humiliation, over the brusqueness and rudeness which characterized his manner towards her.

She recalled, more often than the priest would have cared to have known, that pursuit of theirs, of the demented Andersen, and how in his annoyance and confusion he had behaved to her in a fashion not only rough but positively unkind.

It was clear that he was growing more and more slavishly infatuated with Gladys; and Vennie could only pray that the days might pass quickly and the grotesque blasphemy of the confirmation service be carried through and done with, so that the evil spell of her presence should be lifted and broken.

Prayer indeed — poor little forlorn saint! — was all that was left to her, outside her mother's exacting affection, and she made a constant and desperate use of it. Only the little painted wooden image, in her white-washed room, a pathetic reproduction of the famous Nuremburg Madonna, could have betrayed how long were the hours in which she gave herself

up to these passionate appeals. She prayed for Clavering in that shy heart-breaking manner — never whispering his name, even to the ears of Our Lady, but always calling him "he" and "him" — in which girls are inclined to pray for the man to whom they have sacrificed their peace. She prayed desperately for Lacrima, that at the last moment, contrary to all hope, some intervention might arrive.

Thus it came about, that beneath the roofs of Nevilton — for neither James Andersen nor Mr. Quincunx were "praying men" — only one voice was lifted up, the voice of the last of the old race of the place's rulers, to protest against the flowing forward to its fatal end, of this evil tide.

Nevertheless, things moved steadily and irresistibly on; and it seemed as though it were as improbable that those shimmering mists which every evening crept up the sides of Leo's Hill should endure the heat of the August noons, as that the prayers of this frail child should change the course of ordained destiny.

If none but her little painted Madonna knew how passionate were Vennie's spiritual struggles; not even that other Vennie, of the long-buried royal court, whose mournful nun's eyes looked out upon the great entrance-hall, knew what turbulent thoughts and anxieties possessed the soul of Gladys Romer.

Was Mr. Taxater right in the formidable hint he had given the young stone-carver, as to the result of his amour with his employer's daughter? Was Gladys not only the actual mistress of Luke, but the prospective mother of a child of their strange love?

Whatever were the fair-haired girl's thoughts and

apprehensions, she kept them rigidly to herself; and not even Lacrima, in her wildest imagination, ever dreamed that things had gone as far as that. If it had chanced to be, as Mr. Taxater supposed, and as Luke seemed willing to admit, Gladys was apparently relying upon some vague accident in the course of events, or upon some hidden scheme of her own, to escape the exposure which the truth of such a supposition seemed to render inevitable.

The fact remained that she let matters drift on, and continued to prepare — in her own fashion — not only for her reception into the Church of England, but for her marriage to the wealthy American.

Dangelis was continually engaged now in running backwards and forwards to town on business connected with his marriage; and with a view to making these trips more pleasantly and conveniently he had acquired a smart touring-car of his own, which he soon found himself able to drive without assistance. The pleasure of these excursions, leading him, in delicious solitude, through so many unvisited country places and along such historic roads, had for the moment distracted his attention from his art.

He rarely took Gladys with him; partly because he regarded himself as still but a learner in the science of driving, but more because he felt, at this critical moment of his life, an extraordinary desire to be alone with his own thoughts. Most of these thoughts, it is true, were such as it would not have hurt the feelings of his fiancée to have surprised in their passage through his mind; but not quite all of them. Ever since the incident of Auber Lake, an incident which threw the character of his betrothed into no very

charming light, Dangelis had had his moments of uneasiness and misgiving. He could not altogether conceal from himself that his attraction to Gladys was rather of a physical than of a spiritual, or even of a psychic nature.

Once or twice, while the noble expanses of Salisbury Plain or the New Forest thrilled him with a pure dilation of soul, as he swept along in the clear air, he was on the verge of turning his car straight to the harbour of Southampton and taking the first boat that offered itself, bound East, West, North or South — it mattered nothing the direction! — so that an impassable gulf of free sea-water should separate him forever from the hot fields and woods of Nevilton.

Once, when reaching a cross-road point, where the name of the famous harbour stared at him from a sign-post, he had even gone so far as to deviate to the extent of several miles from his normal road. But that intolerable craving for the girl's soft-clinging arms and supple body, with which she had at last succeeded in poisoning the freedom of his mind, drew him back with the force of a magnet.

The day at length approached, when, on the festival of his favorite saint, Mr. Clavering was to perform the ceremony, to which he had looked forward so long and with such varied feelings. It was Saturday, and on the following morning, in a service especially arranged to take place privately, between early celebration and ordinary matins, Gladys was to be baptized.

Dangelis had suddenly declared his intention of making his escape from a proceeding which to his American mind seemed entirely uncalled for, and to

his pagan humour seemed not a little grotesque. He had decided to start, immediately after breakfast, and motor to London, this time by way of Trowbridge and Westbury.

The confirmation ceremony, for reasons connected with the convenience of the Lord Bishop, had been finally fixed for the ensuing Wednesday, so that only two days were destined to elapse between the girl's reception into the Church, and her admission to its most sacred rites. Dangelis was sufficiently a heathen to desire to be absent from this event also, though he had promised Mr. Clavering to support his betrothed on the occasion of her first Communion on the following Sunday, which would be their last Sunday together as unwedded lovers.

On this occasion, Gladys persuaded him to let her ride by his side a few miles along the Yeoborough road. They had just reached the bridge across the railway-line, about a mile and a half from the village, when they caught sight of Mr. John Goring, returning from an early visit to the local market.

Gladys made the artist stop the car, and she got out to speak to her uncle. After a minute or two's conversation, she informed Dangelis that she would return with Mr. Goring by the field-path, which left the road at that point and followed the track of the railway. The American, obedient to her wish, set his car in motion, and waving her a gay good-bye, disappeared swiftly round an adjacent corner.

Gladys and her uncle proceeded to walk slowly homeward, across the meadows; neither of them, however, paying much attention to the charm of the way. In vain from the marshy hollows between their

path and the metal track, certain brilliant clumps of ragged robin and red rattle signalled to them to pause and admire. Gladys and Mr. Goring strolled forward, past these allurements, with a superb absorption in their own interests.

"I can't think, uncle," Gladys was saying, "how it is that you can go on in the way you're doing; you, a properly engaged person, and not seeing anything of your young lady?"

The farmer laughed. "Ah! my dear, but what matter? I shall see her soon enough; all I want to, maybe."

"But most engaged people like to see a little of one another before they're married, don't they, uncle? I know Ralph would be quite mad if he couldn't see *me*."

"But, my pretty, this is quite a different case. When Bert and I" — he spoke of the idiot as if they had been comrades, instead of master and servant — "have bought a new load of lop-ears, we never tease 'em or fret 'em before we get 'em home."

"But Lacrima isn't a rabbit!" cried Gladys impatiently; "she's a girl like me, and wants what all girls want, to be petted and spoilt a little before she's plunged into marriage."

"She didn't strike me as wanting anything of that kind, when I made up to her in our parlour," replied Mr. Goring.

"Oh you dear old stupid!" cried his niece, "can't you understand that's what we're all like? We all put on airs, and have fancies, and look cross; but we want to be petted all the same. We want it all the more!"

"I reckon I'd better leave well alone all the same, just at present," observed the farmer. "If I was to go stroking her and making up to her, while she's on the road, maybe when we got her into the hutch she'd bite like a weasel."

"She'd never really bite!" retorted his companion. "You don't know her as well as I do. I tell you, uncle, she's got no more spirit than a tame pigeon."

"I'm not so sure of that," said the farmer.

Gladys flicked the grass impatiently with the end of her parasol.

"You may take my word for it, uncle," she continued. "The whole thing's put on. It's all affectation and nonsense. Do you think she'd have agreed to marry you if she wasn't ready for a little fun? Of course she's ready! She's only waiting for you to begin. It makes it more exciting for her, when she cries out and looks injured. That's the only reason why she does it. Lots of girls are like that, you know!"

"Are they, my pretty, are they? 'Tis difficult to tell that kind, maybe, from the other kind. But I'm not a man for too much of these fancy ways."

"You're not drawing back, uncle, are you?" cried Gladys, in considerable alarm.

"God darn me, no!" replied the farmer. "I'm going to carry this business through. Don't you fuss yourself. Only I like doing these things in my own way — dost understand me, my dear? — in my own way; and then, if so be they go wrong, I can't put the blame on no one else."

"I wonder you aren't more keen, uncle," began Gladys insinuatingly, following another track, "to

see more of a pretty girl you're just going to marry. I don't believe you half know how pretty she is! I wish you could see her doing her hair in the morning."

"I shall see her, soon enough, my lass; don't worry," replied the farmer.

"I should so love to see you give her one kiss," murmured Gladys. "Of course, she'd struggle and make a fuss, but she'd really be enjoying it all the time."

"Maybe she would, my pretty, and maybe she wouldn't. I'm not one that likes hearing either rabbits or maidens start the squealing game. It fair gives me the shivers. Bert, he can stand it, but I never could. It's nature, I suppose. A man can't change his nature no more than a cow nor a horse."

"I can't understand you, uncle," observed Gladys. "If I were in your place, I'm sure I shouldn't be satisfied without at least kissing the girl I was going to marry. I'd find some way of getting round her, however sulky she was. Oh, I'm sure you don't half know how nice Lacrima is to kiss!"

"I suppose she isn't so mighty different, come to that," replied the farmer, "than any other maid. I don't mind if I give *you* a kiss, my beauty!" he added, encircling his niece with an affectionate embrace and kissing her flushed cheek. "There — there! Best let well alone, sweetheart, and leave your old uncle to manage his own little affairs according to his own fashion!"

But Gladys was not so easily put off. She had recourse to her fertile imagination.

"You should have heard what she said to me the

other night, uncle. You know the way girls talk — or you ought to, anyhow! She said she hoped you'd go on being the same simple fool, after you were married. She said she'd find it mighty easy to twist you round her finger. 'Why,' she said, 'I can do what I like with him now. He treats me as if I were a high-born lady and he were a mere common man. I believe he's downright afraid of me!' That's the sort of things she says about you, uncle. She thinks in her heart that you're just a fool, a simple frightened fool!"

"Darn her! she does, does she?" cried Mr. Goring, touched at last by the serpent's tongue. "She thinks I'm a fool, does she? Well! Let her have her laugh. Them laughs best as laughs last, in my thinking!"

"Yes, she thinks you're a great big silly fool, uncle. Of course its all pretence, her talk about wanting you to be like that; but that's what she thinks you are. What she'd really like — only she doesn't say so, even to me — would be for you to catch her suddenly round the waist and kiss her on the mouth, and laugh at her pretendings. I expect she's waiting to give you a chance to do something of that sort; only you don't come near her. Oh, she must think you're a monstrous fool! She must chuckle to herself to think what a fool you are."

"I'll teach her what kind of a fool I am," muttered Mr. Goring, "when I've got her to myself, up at the farm. This business of dangling after a maid's apron strings, this kissing and cuddling, don't suit somehow with my nature. I'm not one of your fancy-courting ones and never was!"

"Listen, uncle!" said Gladys eagerly, laying her

hand on his arm. "Suppose I was to take her up to Cæsar's Quarry this afternoon? That would be a lovely chance! You could come strolling round about four o'clock. I'd be on the watch; and before she knew you were there, I'd scramble out, and you could climb down. She couldn't get away from you, and you'd have quite a nice little bit of love-making."

Mr. Goring paused, and prodded the ground with the end of his stick.

"What a little devil you are!" he exclaimed. "Darn me if this here job isn't a queer business! Here are you, putting yourself out and fussing around, only for a fellow to have what's due to him. You leave us alone, sweetheart, my young lady and me! I reckon we know what's best for ourselves, without you thrusting your hand in."

"But you might just walk up that way, uncle; it isn't far over the hill. I'd give—oh, I don't know what! — to see you two together. She wants to be teased a little, you know! She's getting too proud and self-satisfied for anything. It would do her ever so much good to be taught a lesson. It isn't much to do, is it? Just to give the girl you're going to marry one little kiss?"

"But how do I know you two wenches aren't fooling me, even now?" protested the cautious farmer. "'Tis just the sort of maids' trick ye might set out to play upon a man. How do I know ye haven't put your two darned little heads together over this job?"

Gladys looked round. They were approaching the Mill Copse.

"Please, uncle," she cried, "don't say such things to me. You know I wouldn't join with anyone against you. Least of all with her! Just do as I tell you, and stroll up to Cæsar's Quarry about four o'clock. I promise you faithfully I haven't said a word to her about it. Please, uncle, be nice and kind over this."

She threw her arms round Mr. Goring's neck. "You haven't done anything for me for a long time," she murmured in her most persuasive tone. "Do you remember how I used to give you butterfly-kisses when I was a little girl, and you kept apples for me in the big loft?

Mr. Goring's nature may, or may not have been, as he described it; it is certain that the caresses and cajoleries of his lovely niece had an instantaneous effect upon him. His slow-witted suspicions melted completely under the spell of her touch.

"Well, my pretty," he said, as they moved on, under the shadowy trees of the park, "maybe, if I've nothing else to do and things seem quiet, I'll take a bit of a walk this afternoon. But you mustn't count on it. If I do catch sight of 'ee, 'round Cæsar's way, I'll let 'ee know. But 'tisn't a downright promise, mind!"

Gladys clapped her hands. "You're a perfect love, uncle!" she cried jubilantly. "I wish I were Lacrima; I'd be ever, ever so nice to you!"

"Ye can be nice to me, as 'tis, sweetheart," replied the farmer. "You and me have always been kind of fond of each other, haven't us? But I reckon ye'd best be slipping off now, up to your house. I never care greatly for meeting your father by acci-

dent-like. He's one of these sly ones that always makes a fellow feel squeamy and leery."

That afternoon it happened that the adventurous Luke had planned a trip down to Weymouth, with a new flame of his, a certain Polly Shadow, whose parents kept a tobacco-shop in Yeoborough.

He had endeavoured to persuade his brother to accompany them on this little excursion, in the hope that a breath of sea-air might distract and refresh him; but James had expressed his intention of paying a visit to his gentle restorer, up at Wild Pine, who was now sufficiently recovered to enable her to sit out in the shade of the great trees.

The church clock had just struck three, when James Andersen approached the entrance to Nevil's Gully.

He had not advanced far into the shadow of the beeches, when he heard the sound of voices. He paused, and listened. The clear tones of Ninsy Lintot were unmistakeable, and he thought he detected—though of this he was not sure—the nervous high-pitched voice of Philip Wone. From the direction of the sounds, he gathered that the two young people were seated somewhere on the bracken-covered slope above the barton, where, as he well knew, there were several shady terraces overlooking the valley.

Unwilling to plunge suddenly into a conversation that appeared, as far as he could catch its purport, to be of considerable emotional tension, Andersen cautiously ascended the moss-grown bank on his left, and continued his climb, until he had reached the crest of the hill. He then followed, as silently as he could, the little grassy path between the stubble-

field and the thickets, until he came to the open space immediately above these fern-covered terraces.

Yes, his conjecture had been right. Seated side by side beneath the tall-waving bracken, the auburn-haired Ninsy and her anarchist friend were engaged in an absorbing and passionate discussion. Both of them were bare-headed, and the young man's hand rested upon the motionless fingers of his companion, which were clasped demurely upon her lap. Philip's voice was raised in intense and pitiful supplication.

"I'd care for you day and night," Andersen heard him cry. "I'd nurse you when you were ill, and keep you from every kind of annoyance."

"But, Philip dear," the girl's voice answered, "you know what the doctor said. He said I mustn't marry on any account. So even if I had nothing against it, it wouldn't be possible for us to do this."

"Ninsy, Ninsy!" cried the youth pathetically, "don't you understand what I mean? I can't bear having to say these things, but you force me to, when you talk like that. The doctor meant that it would be wrong for you to have children, and he took if for granted that you'd never find anyone ready to live with you as I'd live with you. It would only be a marriage in name. I mean it would only be a marriage in name in regard to children. It would be a real marriage to me, it would be heaven to me, to live side by side with you, and no one able any more to come between us! I can't realize such happiness. It makes me feel dizzy even to think of it!"

Ninsy unclasped her hands, and gently repulsing him, remained buried in deep thought. Standing erect above them, like a sentry upon a palisade, James

Andersen stared gloomily down upon this little drama. In some strange way, — perhaps because of some sudden recurrence of his mental trouble, — he seemed quite unconscious of anything dishonourable or base in thus withholding from these two people the knowledge that he was overhearing them.

"I'll take care of you to the end of my life!" the young man repeated. "I'm doing quite well now with my work. You'll be able to have all you want. You'll be better off than you are here, and you know perfectly well that as soon as your father's free he'll marry that friend of his in Yeoborough. I saw him with her last Sunday. I'm sure its only for your sake that he stays single. She's got three children, and that's what holds him back — that, and the thought that you two mightn't get on together. You'd be doing your father a kindness if you said yes to me, Ninsy. Please, please, my darling, say it, and make me grateful to you forever!"

"I can't say it, — Philip, dear, I can't, I can't"; murmured the girl, in a voice so low that the sentinel above them could only just catch her words. "I do care for you, and I do value your goodness to me, but I can't say the words, Philip. Something seems to stop me, something in my throat."

It was not to her throat however, that the agitated Ninsy raised her thin hands. As she pressed them against her breast a look of tragic sorrow came into her face. Philip regarded her wistfully.

"You're thinking you don't love me, dear, — and never can love me. I know that, well enough! I know you don't love me as I love you. But what does that matter? I've known that, all the time.

The thing is, you won't find anyone who loves you as I do, — ready to live with you as I've said I will, ready to nurse you and look after you. Other people's love will be always asking and demanding from you. Mine — oh, it's true, my darling, it's true! — mine only wants to give up everything to make you happy."

Ninsy was evidently more than a little moved by the boy's appeal. There was a ring of passionate sincerity in his tone which went straight to her heart. She bent down and covered her face with her hands. When at length she lifted up her head and answered him, there were tears on her cheeks, and the watchful listener above them did not miss the quiver in her tone.

"I'm sorry, Philip boy, more sorry than I can say, that I can't be nicer to you, that I can't show my gratitude to you, in the way you wish. But though I do care for you, and — and value your dear love — something stops me, something makes it impossible that this should happen."

"I believe it's because you love that fellow Andersen!" cried the excited youth, leaping to his feet in his agitation.

In making this movement, the figure of the stone-carver, silhouetted with terrible distinctness against the sky-line, became visible to him. Instinctively he uttered a cry of surprise and anger.

"What do you want here? You've been listening! You've been spying on us! Get away, can't you! Get back to your pretty young lady — her that's going to marry John Goring for the sake of his money! Clear out of this, do you hear? Ninsy's

sick of you and your ways. Clear off! or I'll make you — eavesdropper!"

By this time Ninsy had also risen, and stood facing the figure above them. Every vestige of colour had left her cheeks, and her hand was pressed against her side. Andersen made a curious incoherent sound and took a step towards them.

"Get away, can't you!" reiterated the furious youth. "You've caused enough trouble here already. Look at her, — can't you see how ill she is? Get back — damn you! — unless you want to kill her."

Ninsy certainly looked as though in another moment she were going to fall. She made a piteous little gesture, as if to ward off from Andersen the boy's savage words, but Philip caught her passionately round the waist.

"Get away!" he cried once more. She belongs to me now. You might have had her, you coward — you turncoat! — but you let her go for your newer prey. Oh, you're a fine gentleman, James Andersen, a fine faithful gentleman! *You* don't hold with strikes. *You* don't hold with workmen rising against masters. *You* hold with keeping in with those that are in power. Clear off — eavesdropper! Get back to Mistress John Goring and your nice brother! He's as pretty a gentleman as you are, with his dear Miss Gladys!"

Ninsy's feet staggered beneath her and she began to hang limp upon his arm. She opened her mouth to speak, but could only gasp helplessly. Her wide-open eyes — staring from her pallid face — never left Andersen for a moment. Of Philip she seemed absolutely unconscious. The stone-carver made another

step down the hill. His eyes, too, were fixed intently on the girl, and of his rival's angry speeches he seemed utterly oblivious.

"Get away!" the boy reiterated, beside himself with fury, supporting the drooping form of his companion as if its weight were nothing. "We've had enough of your shilly-shallying and trickery! We've had enough of your fine manners! A damned cowardly spy — that's what I call you, you well-behaved gentleman! Get back — can't you!"

The drooping girl uttered some incoherent words and made a helpless gesture with her hand. Andersen seemed to read her meaning in her eyes, for he paused abruptly in his approach and stretched out his arms.

"Good-bye, Ninsy!" he murmured in a low voice. He said no more, and turning on his heel, scrambled swiftly back over the crest of the ridge and disappeared from view.

Philip flung a parting taunt after him, and then, lifting the girl bodily off her feet, staggered down the slope to the cottage, holding her in his arms.

Meanwhile James Andersen walked swiftly across the stubble-field in the direction of Leo's Hill. At the pace he moved it only took him some brief minutes to reach the long stone wall that separates, in this quarter, the quarried levels of the promontory from the high arable lands which abut upon it.

He climbed over this barrier and strode blindly and recklessly forward among the slippery grassy paths that crossed one another along the edges of the deeper pits.

The stone-carver was approaching, though quite unconsciously, the scene of a very remarkable drama.

Some fifteen minutes before his approach, the two girls from Nevilton House had reached the precipitous edge of what was known in that locality as Cæsar's Quarry. Cæsar's Quarry was a large disused pit, deeper and more extensive than most of the old excavations on the Hill, and surrounded, on all but one side, by blank precipitous walls of weather-stained sandstone. These walls of smooth stone remained always dark and damp, whatever the temperature might be of the air above them; and the floor of the Quarry was composed of a soft verdant carpet of cool moist moss, interspersed by stray heaps of discoloured rubble, on which flourished, at this particular season of the year, masses of that sombre-foliaged weed known as wormwood.

On the northern side of Cæsar's Quarry rose a high narrow ridge of rock, divided, at uneven spaces, by deeply cut fissures or chasms, some broad and some narrow, but all overgrown to the very edge by short slippery grass. This ridge, known locally as Claudy's Leap, was a favourite venture-place of the more daring among the children of the neighbourhood, who would challenge one another to feats of courage and agility, along its perilous edge.

On the side of Claudy's Leap, opposite from Cæsar's Quarry, was a second pit, of even deeper descent than the other, but of much smaller expanse. This second quarry, also disused for several generations, remained so far nameless, destiny having, it might seem, withheld the baptismal honour, until the place had earned a right to it by becoming the scene of some tragic, or otherwise noteworthy, event.

Gladys and Lacrima approached Cæsar's Quarry

from the western side, from whose slope a little winding path — the only entrance or exit attainable — led down into its shadowy depths. The Italian glanced with a certain degree of apprehension into the gulf beneath her, but Gladys seemed to take the thing so much for granted, and appeared so perfectly at her ease, that she was ashamed to confess her tremors. The elder girl, indeed, continued chatting cheerfully to her companion about indifferent matters, and as she clambered down the little path in front of her, she turned once or twice, in her fluent discourse, to make sure that Lacrima was following. The two cousins stood for awhile in silence, side by side, when they reached the bottom.

"How nice and cool it is!" cried Gladys, after a pause. "I was getting scorched up there! Let's sit down a little, shall we, — before we start back? I love these old quarries."

They sat down, accordingly, upon a heap of stones, and Gladys serenely continued her chatter, glancing up, however, now and again, to the frowning ridges of the precipices above them.

They had not waited long in this way, when the quarry-owner's daughter gave a perceptible start, and raised her hand quickly to her lips.

Her observant eye had caught sight of the figure of Mr. John Goring peering down upon them from the opposite ridge. Had Lacrima observed this movement and lifted her eyes too, she would have received a most invaluable warning, but the Powers whoever they may have been, who governed the sequence of events upon Leo's Hill, impelled her to keep her head lowered, and her interest concentrated

upon a tuft of curiously feathered moss. Gladys remained motionless for several moments, while the figure on the opposite side vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. Then she slowly rose.

"Oh, how silly I am," she cried; "I've dropped that bunch of marjoram. Stop a minute, dear. Don't move! I'll just run up and get it. It was in the path. I know exactly where!"

"I'll come with you if you like," said Lacrima listlessly, "then you won't have to come back. Or why not leave it for a moment?"

"It's on the path, I tell you!" cried her cousin, already some way up the slope; "I'm scared of someone taking it. Marjoram isn't common about here. Oh no! Stay where you are. I'll be back in a second."

The Italian relapsed into her former dreamy unconcern. She listlessly began stripping the leaves from a spray of wormwood which grew by her side. The place where she sat was in deep shadow, though upon the summit of the opposite ridge the sun lay hot. Her thoughts hovered about her friend in Dead Man's Lane. She had vaguely hoped to get a glimpse of him this afternoon, but the absence of Dangelis had interfered with this.

She began building fantastic castles in the air, trying to call up the image of a rejuvenated Mr. Quincunx, freed from all cares and worries, living the placid epicurean life his heart craved. Would he, she wondered, recognize then, what her sacrifice meant? Or would he remain still obsessed by this or the other cynical fantasy, as far from the real truth of things as a madman's dream? She smiled

gently to herself as she thought of her friend's peculiarities. Her love for him, as she felt it now, across a quivering gulf of misty space, was a thing as humorously tolerant and tender as it might have been had they been man and wife of many years' standing. In these things Lacrima's Latin blood gave her a certain maturity of feeling, and emphasized the maternal element in her attachment.

She contemplated dreamily the smooth bare walls of the cavernous arena in which she sat. Their coolness and dampness was not unpleasant after the heat of the upper air, but there was something sepulchral about them, something that gave the girl the queer impression of a colossal tomb—a tomb whose scattered bones might even now be lying, washed by centuries of rain, under the rank weeds of these heaps of rubble.

She heard the sound of someone descending the path behind her but, taking for granted that it was her cousin, she did not turn her head. It was only when the steps were quite close that she recognized that they were too heavy to be those of a girl.

Then she leapt to her feet, and swung round, —to find herself confronted by the sturdy figure of Mr. John Goring. She gave a wild cry of panic and fled blindly across the smooth floor of the great quarry. Mr. Goring followed her at his leisure.

The girl's terror was so great, that, hardly conscious of what she did, she ran desperately towards the remotest corner of the excavation, where some ancient blasting-process had torn a narrow crevice out of the solid rock. This direction of her flight made the farmer's pursuit of her a fatally easy undertaking,

for the great smooth walls closed in, at a sharp angle, at that point, and the crevice, where the two walls met, only sank a few feet into the rock.

Mr. Goring, observing the complete hopelessness of the girl's mad attempt to escape him, proceeded to advance towards her as calmly and leisurely as if she had been some hare or rabbit he had just shot. The fact that Lacrima had chosen this particular cul-de-sac, on the eastern side of the quarry, was a most felicitous accident for Gladys, for it enabled her to watch the event with as much ease as if she had been a Drusilla or a Livia, seated in the Roman amphitheatre. The fair-haired girl crept to the extreme brink of the steep descent and there, lying prone on the thyme-scented grass, her chin propped upon her hands, she followed with absorbed interest the farmer's movements as he approached his recalcitrant fiancée.

The terrified girl soon found out the treachery of the panic-instinct which had led her into this trap. Had she remained in the open, it is quite possible that by a little manœuvring she could have escaped; but now her only exit was blocked by her advancing pursuer.

Turning to face him, and leaning back against the massive wall of stone, she stretched out her arms on either side of her, seizing convulsively in her fingers some tufts of knot-grass which grew on the surface of the rock. Here, with panting bosom and pallid cheeks, she awaited his approach. Her tense figure and terror-stricken gaze only needed the imprisoning fetters to have made of her an exact modern image of the unfortunate Andromeda. She neither moved

nor uttered the least cry, as Mr. Goring drew near her.

At that moment a wild and unearthly shout reverberated through the quarry. The sound of it—caught up by repeated echoes — went rolling away across Leo's Hill, frightening the sheep and startling the cider-drinkers in the lonely inn. Gladys leapt to her feet, ran round to where the path descended, and began hastily scrambling down. Mr. Goring retreated hurriedly into the centre of the arena, and with his hand shading his eyes gazed up at the intruder.

It was no light-footed Perseus, who on behalf of this forlorn child of classic shores, appeared as if from the sky. It was, indeed, only the excited figure of James Andersen that Mr. Goring's gaze, and Lacrima's bewildered glance, encountered simultaneously. The stone-carver seemed to be possessed by a legion of devils. His first thundering shout was followed by several others, each more terrifying than the last, and Gladys, rushing past the astonished farmer, seized Lacrima by the arm.

"Come!" she cried. "Uncle was a brute to frighten you. But, for heaven's sake, let's get out of this, before that madman collects a crowd! They'll all be down here from the inn in another moment. Quick, dear, quick! Our only chance is to get away now."

Lacrima permitted her cousin to hurry her across the quarry and up the path. As they neared the summit of the slope the Italian turned and looked back. Mr. Goring was still standing where they had left him, gazing with petrified interest at the wild gestures of the man above him.

Andersen seemed beside himself. He kept frantically waving his arms, and seemed engaged in some incoherent defiance of the invisible Powers of the air. Lacrima, as she looked at him, became convinced that he was out of his mind. She could not even be quite clear if he recognized her. She was certain that it was not against her assailant that his wild cries and defiances were hurled. It did not appear that he was even aware of the presence of the farmer. Whether or not he had seen her and known her when he uttered his first cry, she could not tell. It was certainly against no earthly enemies that the man was struggling now.

Vennie Seldom might have hazarded the superstitious suggestion that his fit was not madness at all but a sudden illumination, vouchsafed to his long silence, of the real conditions of the airy warfare that is being constantly waged around us. At that moment, Vennie might have said, James Andersen was the only perfectly sane person among them, for to his eyes alone, the real nature of that heathen place and its dark hosts was laid manifestly bare. The man, according to this strange view, was wrestling to the death, in his supreme hour, against the Forces that had not only darkened his own days and those of Lacrima, but had made the end of his mother's life so tragic and miserable.

Gladys dragged Lacrima away as soon as they reached the top of the ascent but the Pariah had time to mark the last desperate gesture of her deliverer before he vanished from her sight over the ridge.

Mr. Goring overtook them before they had gone

far, and walked on with them, talking to Gladys about Andersen's evident insanity.

"It's no good my trying to do anything," he remarked. "But I'll send Bert round for Luke as soon as I get home. Luke'll bring him to his senses. They say he's been taken like this before, and has come round. He hears voices, you know, and fancies things."

They walked in silence along the high upland road that leads from the principal quarries of the Hill to the Wild Pine hamlet and Nevil's Gully. When they reached the latter place, the two girls went on, down Root-Thatch Lane, and Mr. Goring took the field-path to the Priory.

Before they separated, the farmer turned to his future bride, who had been careful to keep Gladys between herself and him, and addressed her in the most gentle voice he knew how to assume.

"Don't be angry with me, lass," he said. "I was only teasing, just now. 'Twas a poor jest maybe, and ye've cause to look glowering. But when we two be man and wife ye'll find I'm a sight better to live with than many a fair-spoken one. These be queer times, and like enough I seem a queer fellow, but things'll settle themselves. You take my word for it!"

Lacrima could only murmur a faint assent in reply to these words, but as she entered with Gladys the shadow of the tunnel-like lane, she could not help thinking that her repulsion to this man, dreadful though it was, was nothing in comparison with the fear and loathing with which she regarded Mr. Romer. Contrasted with his sinister relative, Mr.

John Goring was, after all, no more than a rough simpleton.

Meanwhile, on Leo's Hill, an event of tragic significance had occurred. It will be remembered that the last Lacrima had seen of James Andersen was the wild final gesticulation he made, — a sort of mad appeal to the Heavens against the assault of invisible enemies, — before he vanished from sight on the further side of Claudy's Leap. This vanishing just, at that point, meant no more to Lacrima than that he had probably taken a lower path, but had Gladys or Mr. Goring witnessed it, — or any other person who knew the topography of the place, — a much more startling conclusion would have been inevitable. Nor would such a conclusion have been incorrect.

The unfortunate man, forgetting, in his excitement, the existence of the other quarry, the nameless one; forgetting in fact that Claudy's Leap was a razor's edge between two precipices, had stepped heedlessly backwards, after his final appeal to Heaven, and fallen, without a cry, straight into the gulf.

The height of his fall would, in any case, have probably killed him, but as it was "he dashed his head," in the language of the Bible, "against a stone"; and in less than a second after his last cry, his soul, to use the expression of a more pagan scripture, "was driven, murmuring, into the Shades."

It fell to the lot, therefore, not of Luke, who did not return from Weymouth till late that evening, but of a motley band of holiday-makers from the hill-top Inn, to discover the madman's fate. Arriving at the spot almost immediately after the girls' departure, these honest revellers — strangers to the

locality — had quickly found the explanation of the unearthly cries they had heard.

The eve of the baptism of Mr. Romer's daughter was celebrated, therefore, by the baptism of the nameless quarry. Henceforth, in the neighbourhood of Nevilton, the place was never known by any other appellation than that of "Jimmy's Drop"; and by that name any future visitors, curious to observe the site of so singular an occurrence, will have to enquire for it, as they drink their pint of cider in the Half-Moon Tavern.

CHAPTER XXII

A ROYAL WATERING-PLACE

LUKE ANDERSEN'S trip to Weymouth proved most charming and eventful. He had scarcely emerged from the crowded station, with its row of antique omnibuses and its lethargic phalanx of expectant out-porters and bath-chair men, — each one of whom was a crusted epitome of ingrained quaintness, — when he caught sight of Phyllis Santon and Annie Bristow strolling laughingly towards the sea-front. They must have walked to Yeoborough and entered the train there, for he had seen nothing of them at Nevilton Station.

The vivacious Polly, a lively little curly-haired child, of some seventeen summers, was far too happy and thrilled by the adventure of the excursion and the holiday air of the sea-side, to indulge in any jealous fits. She was the first of the two, indeed, to greet the elder girls, both of them quite well known to her, running rapidly after them, in her white stiffly-starched print frock, and hailing them with a shout of joyous recognition.

The girls turned quickly and they all three awaited, in perfect good temper, the stone-carver's deliberate approach. Never had the spirits of this latter been higher, or his surroundings more congenial to his mood.

Anxious not to lose any single one of the exquisite sounds, sights, smells, and intimations, which came

pouring in upon him, as he leisurely drifted out upon the sunny street, he let his little companion run after his two friends as fast as she wished, and watched with serene satisfaction the airy flight of her light figure, with the deep blue patch of sea-line at the end of the street as its welcome background.

The smell of sea-weed, the sound of the waves on the beach, the cries of the fish-mongers, and the coming and going of the whole heterogeneous crowd, filled Luke's senses with the same familiar thrill of indescribable pleasure as he had known, on such an occasion, from his earliest childhood. The gayly piled fruit heaped up on the open stalls, the little tobacco-shops with their windows full of half-sentimental half-vulgar picture-cards, the weather-worn fronts of the numerous public-houses, the woodwork of whose hospitable doors always seemed to him endowed with a peculiar mellowness of their own, — all these things, as they struck his attentive senses, revived the most deeply-felt stirrings of old associations.

Especially did he love the sun-bathed atmosphere, so languid with holiday ease, which seemed to float in and out of the open lodging-house entrances, where hung those sun-dried sea-weeds and wooden spades and buckets, which ever-fresh installments of bare-legged children carried off and replaced. Luke always maintained that of all mortal odours he loved best the indescribable smell of the hall-way of a seaside lodging-house, where the very oil-cloth on the floor, and the dead bull-rushes in the corner, seemed impregnanted with long seasons of salt-burdened sun-filled air.

The fish-shops, the green-grocer's shops, the second-hand book-shops, and most of all, those delicious repositories of sea-treasures — foreign importations all glittering with mother-of-pearl, dried sea-horses, sea-sponges, sea-coral, and wonderful little boxes all pasted over with shimmering shells — filled him with a delight as vivid and new as when he had first encountered them in remote infancy.

This first drifting down to the sea's edge, after emerging from the train, always seemed to Luke the very supremacy of human happiness. The bare legs of the children, little and big, who ran laughing or crying past him and the tangled curls of the elder damsels, tossed so coquettishly back from their sun-burnt faces, the general feeling of irresponsibility in the air, the tang of adventure in it all, of the unexpected, the chance-born, always wrapped him about in an epicurean dream of pleasure.

That monotonous splash of the waves against the pebbles, — how he associated it with endless exquisite flirtations, — flirtations conducted with adorable shamelessness between the blue sky and the blue sea! The memory of these, the vague memory of enchanting forms prone or supine upon the glittering sands, with the passing and re-passing of the same plump bathing-woman, — he had known her since his childhood! — and the same donkeys with their laughing burdens, and the same sweet-sellers with their trays, almost made him cry aloud with delight, as emerging at length upon the Front, and overtaking his friends at the Jubilee Clock-Tower, he saw the curved expanse of the bay lying magically spread out before him. How well he knew it all, and how inexpressibly he loved it!

The tide was on its outward ebb when the four happy companions jumped down, hand in hand, from the esplanade to the shingle. The long dark windrow of broken shells and seaweed drew a pleasant dividing line between the dry and the wet sand. Luke always associated the stranded star-fish and jelly-fish and bits of scattered drift-wood which that windrow offered, with those other casually tossed-up treasures with which an apparently pagan-minded providence had bestrewn his way!

Once well out upon the sands, and while the girls, with little shrieks and bursts of merriment, were pushing one another into the reach of the tide, Luke turned to survey with a deep sigh of satisfaction, the general appearance of the animated scene.

The incomparable watering-place, — with its charming "after-glow," as Mr. Hardy so beautifully puts it, "of Georgian gaiety," — had never looked so fascinating as it looked this August afternoon.

The queer old-fashioned bathing-machines, one of them still actually carrying the Lion and Unicorn upon its pointed roof, glittered in the sunshine with an air of welcoming encouragement. The noble sweep of the houses behind the crescent-shaped esplanade, with the names of their terraces — Brunswick, Regent, Gloucester, Adelaide — so suggestive of the same historic epoch, gleamed with reciprocal hospitality; nor did the tall spire of St. John's Church, a landmark for miles round, detract from the harmony of the picture.

On Luke's left, as he turned once more and faced the sea, the vibrating summer air, free at present from any trace of mist, permitted a wide and lovely

view of the distant cliffs enclosing the bay. The great White Horse, traced upon the chalk hills, seemed within an hour's walk of where he stood, and the majestic promontory of the White Nore drew the eye onward to where, at the end of the visible coast-line, St. Alban's Head sank into the sea.

On Luke's right the immediate horizon was blocked by the grassy eminence known to dwellers in Weymouth as "the Nothe"; but beyond this, and beyond the break-water which formed an extension of it, the huge bulk of Portland — Mr. Hardy's Isle of the Slingers — rose massive and shadowy against the west.

As he gazed with familiar pleasure at this unequalled view, Luke could not help thinking to himself how strangely the pervading charm of scenes of this kind is enhanced by personal and literary association. He recalled the opening chapters of "The Well-Beloved," that curiously characteristic fantasy-sketch of the great Wessex novelist; and he also recalled those amazing descriptions in Victor Hugo's "L'Homme qui Rit," which deal with these same localities.

Shouts of girlish laughter distracted him at last from his exquisite reverie, and flinging himself down on the hot sand he gave himself up to enjoyment. Holding her tight by either hand, the two elder girls, their skirts already drenched with salt-water, were dragging their struggling companion across the foamy sea-verge. The white surf flowed beneath their feet and their screams and laughter rang out across the bay.

Luke called to them that he was going to paddle, and implored them to do the same. He preferred

to entice them thus into the deeper water, rather than to anticipate for them a return home with ruined petticoats and wet sand-filled shoes. Seeing him leisurely engaged in removing his boots and socks and turning up his trousers, the three exuberant young people hurried back to his side and proceeded with their own preparations.

Soon, all four of them, laughing and splashing one another with water, were blissfully wading along the shore, interspersing their playful teasing with alternate complimentary and disparaging remarks, relative to the various bathers whose isolation they invaded.

Luke's spirits rose higher and higher. No youthful Triton, with his attendant Nereids, could have expressed more vividly in his radiant aplomb, the elemental energy of air and sea. His ecstatic delight seemed to reach its culmination as a group of extraordinarily beautiful children came wading towards them, their sunny hair and pearl-bright limbs gleaming against the blue water.

At the supreme moment of this ecstasy, however, came a sudden pang of contrary emotion, — of dark fear and gloomy foreboding. For a sudden passing second, there rose before him, — it was now about half-past four in the afternoon, — the image of his brother, melancholy and taciturn, his heart broken by Lacrima's trouble. And then, like a full dark tide rolling in upon him, came that ominous reaction, spoken of by the old pagan writers, and regarded by them as the shadow of the jealousy of the Immortal Gods, envious of human pleasure — the reaction to the fare of the Eumenides.

His companions remained as gay and charming as ever. Nothing could have been prettier than to watch the mixture of audacity and coyness with which they twisted their frocks round them, nothing more amusing than to note the differences of character between the three, as they betrayed their naive souls in their childish abandonment to the joy of the hour.

Both Phyllis and Annie were tall and slender and dark. But there the likeness between them ceased. Annie had red pouting lips, the lower one of which protruded a little beyond its fellow, giving her face in repose a quite deceptive look of sullenness and petulance. Her features were irregular and a little heavy, the beauty of her countenance residing in the shadowy coils of dusky hair which surmounted it, and in the velvet softness of her large dark eyes. For all the heaviness of her face, Annie's expression was one of childlike innocence and purity; and when she flirted or made love, she did so with a clinging affectionateness and serious gravity which had much of the charm of extreme youth.

Phyllis, on the contrary, had softly outlined features of the most delicate regularity, while from her hazel eyes and laughing parted lips perpetual defiant provocations of alluring mischief challenged everyone she approached. Annie was the more loving of the two, Phyllis the more lively and amorous. Both of them made constant fun of their little curly-headed companion, whose direct boyish ways and whimsical speeches kept them in continual peals of merriment.

Tired at last of paddling, they all waded to the shore, and crossing the warm powdery sand, which is one of the chief attractions of the place, they sat

down on the edge of the shingle and dried their feet in the sun.

Reassuming their shoes and stockings, and demurely shaking down their skirts, the three girls followed the now rather silent Luke to the little tea-house opposite the Clock-Tower, in an upper room of which, looking out on the sea, were several pleasant window-seats furnished with convenient tables.

The fragrant tea, the daintiness of its accessories, the fresh taste of the bread and butter, not to speak of the inexhaustible spirits of his companions, soon succeeded in dispelling the stone-carver's momentary depression.

When the meal was over, as their train was not due to leave till nearly seven, and it was now hardly five, Luke decided to convey his little party across the harbour-ferry. They strolled out of the shop into the sunshine, not before the stone-carver had bestowed so lavish a tip upon the little waitress that his companions exchanged glances of feminine dismay.

They took the road through the old town to reach the ferry, following the southern of the two parallel streets that debouch from the Front at the point where stands the old-fashioned equestrian statue of George the Third. Luke nourished in his heart a sentimental tenderness for this simple monarch, vaguely and quite erroneously associating the royal interest in the place with his own dreamy attachment to it.

When they reached the harbour they found it in a stir of excitement owing to the arrival of the passenger-boat from the Channel Islands, one of the red-funneled modern successors to those antique

paddle-steamers whose first excursions must have been witnessed from his Guernsey refuge by the author of the "Toilers of the Deep." Side by side with the smartly painted ship, were numerous schooners and brigs, hailing from more northern regions, whose cargoes were being unloaded by a motley crowd of clamorous dock-hands.

Luke and his three companions turned to the left when they reached the water's edge and strolled along between the warehouses and the wharves until they arrived at the massive bridge which crosses the harbour. Leaning upon the parapet, whose whitish-grey fabric indicated that the dominion of Leo's Hill gave place here to the noble Portland Stone, they surveyed with absorbed interest the busy scene beneath them.

The dark greenish-colored water swirled rapidly seaward in the increasing ebb of the tide. White-winged sea-gulls kept swooping down to its surface and rising again in swift air-cutting curves, balancing their glittering bodies against the slanting sunlight. Every now and then a boat-load of excursionists would shoot out from beneath the shadow of the wharves and shipping, and cross obliquely the swift-flowing tide to the landing steps on the further shore.

The four friends moved to the northern parapet of the bridge, and the girls gave little cries of delight, to see, at no great distance, where the broad expanse of the back-water began to widen, a group of stately swans, rocking serenely on the shining waves. They remained for some while, trying to attract these birds by flinging into the water bits of broken cake, saved by the economic-minded Annie from the recent

repast. But these offerings only added new spoil to the plunder of the greedy sea-gulls, from whose rapid movements the more aristocratic inland creatures kept haughtily aloof.

Preferring to use the ferry for their crossing rather than the bridge, Luke led his friends back, along the wharves, till they reached the line of slippery steps about which loitered the lethargic owners of the ferry-boats. With engaging alarm, and pretty gasps and murmurs of half-simulated panic, the three young damsels were helped down into one of these rough receptacles, and the bare-necked, affable oarsman proceeded, with ponderous leisureliness, to row them across.

As the heavy oars rattled in their rowlocks, and the swirling tide gurgled about the keels, Luke, seated in the stern, between Annie and Phyllis, felt once more a thrilling sense of his former emotion. With one hand round Phyllis' waist, and the other caressing Annie's gloveless fingers, he permitted his gaze to wander first up, then down, the flowing tide.

Far out to sea, he perceived a large war-ship, like a great drowsy sea-monster, lying motionless between sky and wave; and sweeping in, round the little pier's point, came a light full-sailed skiff, with the water foaming across its bows.

With the same engaging trepidation in his country-bred comrades, they clambered up the landing-steps, the lower ones of which were covered with green sea-weed, and the upper ones worn smooth as marble by long use, and thence emerged upon the little narrow jetty, bordering upon the harbour's edge.

Here were a row of the most enchanting eighteenth century lodging-houses, interspersed, at incredibly

frequent spaces, by small antique inns, bearing quaint names drawn from British naval history.

Skirting the grassy slopes of the Nothe, with its old-fashioned fort, they rounded the small promontory and climbed down among the rocks and rock-pools which lay at its feet. It was pretty to observe the various flutterings and agitations, and to hear the shouts of laughter and delight with which the young girls followed Luke over these perilous and romantic obstacles, and finally paused at his side upon a great sun-scorched shell-covered rock, surrounded by foamy water.

The wind was cool in this exposed spot, and holding their hats in their hands the little party gave themselves up to the freedom and freshness of air and sea.

But the wandering interest of high-spirited youth is as restless as the waves. Very soon Phyllis and Polly had drifted away from the others, and were climbing along the base of the cliff above, filling their hands with sea-pinks and sea-lavender, which attracted them by their glaucous foliage.

Left to themselves, Luke removed his shoes and stockings, and dangled his feet over the rock's edge, while Annie, prone upon her face, the sunshine caressing her white neck and luxuriant hair, stretched her long bare arms into the cool water.

Leaning across the prostrate form of his companion, and gazing down into the deep recesses of the tidal pool which separated the rock they reclined on from the one behind it, the stone-carver was able to make out the ineffably coloured tendrils and soft translucent shapes of several large sea-anemones, submerged

beneath the greenish water. He pointed these out to his companion, who moving round a little, and tucking up her sleeves still higher, endeavoured to reach them with her hand. In this she was defeated, for the deceptive water was much deeper than either of them supposed.

"What are those darling little shells, down there at the bottom, Luke?" she whispered. Luke, with his arm round her neck, and his head close to hers, peered down into the shadowy depths.

"They're some kind of cowries," he said at last, "shells that in Africa, I believe, they use as money."

"I wish they were money here," murmured the girl, "I'd buy mother one of those silver brushes we saw in the shop."

"Listen!" cried Luke, and taking a penny from his pocket he let it fall into the water. They both fancied they heard a little metallic sound when it struck the bottom.

Suddenly Annie gave a queer excited laugh, shook herself free from her companion's arm, and scrambled up on her knees. Luke lay back on the rock and gazed in wonder at her flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

"What's the matter, child?" he enquired.

She fumbled at her bosom, and Luke noticed for the first time that she was wearing round her neck a little thin metal chain. At last with an impatient movement of her fingers she snapped the resisting cord and flung it into the tide. Then she held out to Luke a small golden object, which glittered in the palm of her hand. It was a weather-stained ring, twisted and bent out of all shape.

"It's *her* ring!" she cried exultantly. "Crazy Bert got it out of that hole, with a bit of bent wire, and Phyllis squirmed it away from him by letting him give her a lift in the wagon. He squeezed her dreadful hard, she do say, and tickled her awful with straws and things, but before evening she had the ring away from him. You can bet I kissed her and thanked her, when I got it! Us two be real friends, as you might call it! Phyllis, cried, in the night, dreaming the idiot was pinching her, and she not able to slap 'im back. But I got the ring, and there 't be, Luke, glittering-gold as ever, though 'tis sad bended and battered."

Luke made a movement to take the object, but the girl closed her fingers tightly upon it and held it high above his head. With her arm thus raised and the glitter of sea and sun upon her form, she resembled some sweetly-carved figure-head on the bows of a ship. The wind fanned her hot cheeks and caressed, with cool touch, her splendid coils of hair. Luke was quite overcome by her beauty, and could only stare at her in dazed amazement, while she repeated, in clear ringing tones, the words of the old country game.

"My lady's lost her golden ring;
Her golden ring, her golden ring;
My lady's lost her golden ring;
I pitch upon you to find it!"

The song's refrain died away over the waves, and was answered by the scream of an astonished cormorant, and by a mocking shout from a group of idle soldiers on the grassy terrace above the cliff.

"Shall us throw her ring out to sea?" cried Annie.

"They say a ring lost so, means sorrow for her that owns it. Say 'yes,' and it's gone, Luke!"

While the girl's arm swung backwards and forwards above him, the stone-carver's thoughts whirled even more rapidly through his brain. A drastic and bold idea, that had often before crossed the threshold of his consciousness, now assumed a most dominant shape. Why not ask Annie to marry him?

He was growing a little weary of his bachelor-life, The wayward track of his days had more than once. of late, seemed to have reached a sort of climax. Why not, at one reckless stroke, end this epoch of his history, and launch out upon another? His close association with James had hitherto stood in the way of any such step, but his brother had fallen recently into such fits of gloomy reticence, that he had found himself wondering more than once whether such a drastic troubling of the waters, as the introduction of a girl into their ménage, would not ease the situation a little. It was not for a moment to be supposed that he and James could separate. If Annie did marry him, she must do so on the understanding of his brother's living with them.

Luke began to review in his mind the various cottages in Nevilton which might prove available for this adventure. It tickled his fancy a great deal, the thought of having a house and garden of his own, and he was shrewd enough to surmise that of all his feminine friends, Annie was by far the best fitted to perform the functions of the good-tempered companion of a philosophical sentimentalist. The gentle creature had troubled him so little by jealous fits in her rôle of sweetheart, that it did not present itself as

probable that she would prove a shrewish wife. Glancing across the blue water to the great Rock-Island opposite them, Luke came rapidly to the conclusion that he would take the risk and make the eventful plunge. He knew enough of himself to have full confidence in his power of dealing with the delicate art of matrimony, and the very difficulties of the situation, implied in the number of his contemporary amours, only added a tang and piquancy to the enterprise.

"Well," cried Annie. "Shall us throw the pretty lady's ring into the deep sea? It'll mean trouble for her, trouble and tears, Luke! Be 'ee of a mind to do it, or be 'ee not? 'Tis your hand must fling it, and with the flinging of it, her heart 'll drop, splash — splash — into deep sorrow. She'll cry her eyes out, for this 'ere job, and that's the truth of it, Luke darling. Be 'ee ready to fling it, or be 'ee not ready? There'll be no getting it back, once us have throwed it in."

She held out her arm towards him as she spoke, and with her other hand pushed back her hair from her forehead. For so soft and tender a creature as the girl was, it was strange, the wild Maenad-like look, which she wore at that moment. She might have been an incarnation of the avenging deities of sea and air, threatening disaster to some unwitting Olympian.

Luke scrambled to his feet, and seizing her wrist with both his hands, forced her fingers apart, and possessed himself of the equivocal trinket.

"If I throw it," he cried, in an excited tone, "will you be my wife, Annie?"

At this unexpected word a complete collapse overtook the girl. All trace of colour left her cheeks and a sudden trembling passed through her limbs. She staggered, and would have fallen, if Luke had not seized her in his arms.

In the shock of saving her, the stone-carver's hand involuntarily unclosed, and the piece of gold, slipping from his fingers, fell down upon the slope of the rock, and sliding over its edge, sank into the deep water.

"Annie! Annie! What is it, dear?" murmured Luke, making the trembling girl sit down by his side, and supporting her tenderly.

For her only answer she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him passionately again and again. It was not only of kisses that Luke became conscious, for, as she pressed him to her, her breast heaved pitifully under her print frock, and when she let him go, the taste of her tears was in his mouth. For the first time in his life the queer wish entered the stone-carver's mind that he had not, in his day, made love quite so often.

There was something so pure, so confiding, and yet so passionately tender, about little Annie's abandonment, that it produced, in the epicurean youth's soul, a most quaint sense of shame and embarrassment. It was deliciously sweet to him, all the same, to find how, beyond expectation, he had made so shrewd a choice. But he wished some humorous demon at the back of his mind wouldn't call up before him at that moment the memory of other clinging arms and lips.

With an inward grin of sardonic commentary upon his melting mood, the cynical thought passed through

his mind, how strange it was, in this mortal world, that human kisses should all so lamentably resemble one another, and that human tears should all leave behind them the same salt taste! Life was indeed a matter of "eternal recurrence," and whether with Portland and its war-ships as the background, or with Nevilton Mount and its shady woods, the same emotions and the same reactions must needs come and go, with the same inexorable monotony!

He glanced down furtively into the foam-flecked water, but there was no sign of the lost ring. The tide seemed to have turned now, and the sea appeared less calm. Little flukes of white spray surged up intermittently on the in-rolling waves, and a strong breath of wind, rising with the sinking of the sun, blew cool and fresh upon their foreheads.

"Her ring's gone," whispered Annie, pulling down her sleeves over her soft arms, and holding out her wrists, for him to fasten the bands, "and you do belong to none but I now, Luke. When shall us be married, dear?" she added, pressing her cool cheek against his, and running her fingers through his hair.

The words, as well as the gesture that accompanied them, jarred upon Luke's susceptibilities.

"Why is it," he thought, "that girls are so extraordinarily stupid in these things? Why do they always seem only waiting for an opportunity to drop their piquancy and provocation, and become confident, assured, possessive, complacent? Have I," he said to himself, "made a horrible blunder? Shall I regret this day forever, and be ready to give anything for those fatal words not to have been uttered?"

He glanced down once more upon the brimming,

in-rushing tide that covered Gladys' ring. Then with a jerk he pulled out his watch.

"Go and call the others," he commanded, "I'm going to have a dip before we start."

Annie glanced quickly into his face, but reassured by his friendly smile, proceeded to obey him, with only the least little sigh.

"Don't drown yourself, dear," she called back to him, as she made her way cautiously across the rocks.

Luke hurriedly undressed, and standing for a moment, a slim golden figure, in the horizontal sunlight, swung himself lightly down over the rock's edge and struck out boldly for the open sea.

With vigorous strokes he wrestled with the inflowing tide. Wave after wave splashed against his face. Pieces of floating sea-weed and wisps of surf clung to his arms and hair. But he held resolutely on, breathing deep breaths of liberty and exultation, and drinking in, as if from a vast wide-brimmed cup, the thrilling spaciousness of air and sky.

Girls, love-making, marriage, — the whole complication of the cloying erotic world, — fell away from him, like the too-soft petals of some great stifling velvet-bosomed flower; and naked of desire, as he was naked of human clothes, he gave himself up to the free, pure elements. In later hours, when once more the old reiterated tune was beating time in his brain, he recalled with regret the large emancipation of that moment.

As he splashed and spluttered, and turned over deliciously in the water, like some exultant human-limbed merman, returning, after a long inland exile, to his natural home, he found his thoughts fantastic-

ally reverting to those queer, mad ideas, about the evil power of the stone they both worked upon, to which James Andersen had given expression when his wits were astray. Here at any rate, in the solid earth's eternal antagonist, was a power capable of destroying every sinister spell.

He remorsefully blamed himself that he had not compelled his brother to come down with them to the sea. He recalled the half-hearted invitation he had extended to James, not altogether sorry to have it refused, and not repeating it. He had been a selfish fool, he thought. Were James swimming now by his side, his pleasure in that violet-coloured coast-line and that titanic rock-monster, would have been doubled by the revival of indescribably appealing memories.

He made a vigorous resolution that never again — whatever mood his brother might be in — would he allow the perilous lure of exquisite femininity, to come between him and the nobler classic bond, of the love that "passeth the love of women."

Conscious that he must return without a moment's further delay if they were to catch their train, he swung round in the water and let the full tide bear him shoreward.

On the way back he was momentarily assailed by a slight touch of cramp in his legs. It quickly passed, but it was enough to give the life-enamoured youth a shock of cold panic. Death? *That*, after all, he thought, was the only intolerable thing. As long as one breathed and moved, in this mad world, nothing that could happen greatly mattered! One was conscious, — one could note the acts and scenes

of the incredible drama; and in this mere fact of consciousness, one could endure anything. But to be dead, — to be deprived of the sweet air, — that remained, that must always remain, the one absolute Terror!

Reaching his starting-place, Luke was amused to observe that the tide was already splashing over their rock, and in another minute or two would have drenched his clothes. He chuckled to himself as he noted how this very practical possibility jerked his mind into a completely different vein. Love, philosophy, friendship, all tend to recede to the very depths of one's invaluable consciousness, when there appears a risk of returning to a railway station in a drenched shirt.

He collected his possessions with extreme rapidity, and holding them in a bundle at arm's length from his dripping body, clambered hastily up the shore, and humorously waving back his modest companions, who were now being chaffed by quite a considerable group of soldiers on the cliff above, he settled himself down on a bank of sea-weed and began hurriedly to dry, using his waistcoat as a towel.

He was soon completely dressed, and, all four of them a little agitated, began a hasty rush for the train.

Phyllis and Polly scolded him all the way without mercy. Had he brought them out here, to keep them in the place all night? What would their mothers say, and their fathers, and their brothers, and their aunts?

Annie, alone of the party, remained silent, her full rich lips closed like a sleepy peony, and her heavy-

lidded velvety eyes casting little timid affectionate glances at her so unexpectedly committed lover.

The crossness of the two younger girls grew in intensity when, the ferry safely crossed, Luke dragged them at remorseless speed through the crowded town. Pitiful longing eyes were cast back at the glittering shops and the magical picture-shows. Why had he taken them to those horrid rocks? Why hadn't he given them time to look at the shop-windows? They'd promised faithfully to bring back something for Dad and Betty and Queenie and Dick.

Phyllis had ostentatiously flung into the harbour her elaborately selected bunch of sea-flora, and the poor ill-used plants, hot from the girl's hand, were now tossing up and down amid the tarry keels and swaying hawsers. The girl regretted this action now, — regretted it more and more vividly as the station drew near. Mummy always loved a bunch o' flowers, and they were so pretty! She was sure it was Luke who had made her lose them. He had pushed her so roughly up those nasty steps.

Tears were in Polly's eyes as, bedraggled and panting, they emerged on the open square where the gentle monarch looks down from his stone horse. There were sailors now, mixed with the crowd on the esplanade, — such handsome boys! It was cruel, it was wicked, that they had to go, just when the real sport began.

The wretched Jubilee Clock — how they all hated its trim appearance! — had a merciless finger pointing at the very minute their train was due to start, as Luke hurried them round the street-corner. Polly fairly began to cry, as they dragged her from the

alluring scene. She was certain that the Funny Men were just going to begin. She was sure that that distant drum meant Punch and Judy!

Breathlessly they rushed upon the platform. Wildly, with anxious eyes and gasping tones, they enquired of the first official they encountered, whether the Yeoborough train had gone.

Observing the beauty of the three troubled girls, this placid authority proceeded to tantalize them, asking "what the hurry was," and whether they wanted a "special," and other maddening questions. It was only when Luke, who had rushed furiously to the platform's remote end, was observed to be cheerfully and serenely returning, that Phyllis recovered herself sufficiently to give their disconcerted insulter what she afterwards referred to as "a bit of lip in return for his blarsted sauce."

No, — the train would not be starting for another ten minutes. Fortunate indeed was this accident of a chance delay on the Great Western Railroad, — the most punctual of all railroads in the world, — for it landed Luke with three happy, completely recovered damsels, and in a compartment all to themselves, when the train did move at last. Abundantly fortified with ginger-pop and sponge-cake, — how closely Luke associated the savour of both these refreshments with such an excursion as this! — and further cheered by the secure possession of chocolates, bananas, "Ally Sloper's Half Holiday," and the "Illustrated London News," — the girls romped, and sang, and teased each other and Luke, and whispered endearing mockeries out of the window to sedately unconscious gentlemen, at every station where they

stopped until the aged guard's paternal benevolence changed to irritable crossness, and Luke himself was not altogether sorry when the familiar landscape of Yeoborough, dusky and shadowy in the twilight, hove in sight.

Little Polly left them at the second of the two Yeoborough stations, and the others, crowding at the window to wave their goodbyes, were carried on in the same train to Nevilton.

During this final five minutes, Annie slipped softly down upon her lover's knees and seemed to wish to indicate to Phyllis, without the use of words, that her relations with their common friend were now on a new plane, — at once more innocent and less reserved.

CHAPTER XXIII

AVE ATQUE VALE!

JAMES ANDERSEN lay dead in the brothers' little bedroom at the station-master's cottage. It could not be maintained that his face wore the unruffled calm conventionally attributed to mortality's last repose. On the other hand, his expression was not that of one who has gone down in hopeless despair.

What his look really conveyed to his grief-worn brother, as he hung over him all that August night, was the feeling that he had been struck in mid-contest, with equal chance of victory or defeat, and with the indelible imprint upon his visage of the stress and strain of the terrific struggle.

It was a long and strange vigil that Luke found himself thus bound to keep, when the first paroxysm of his grief had subsided and his sympathetic landlady had left him alone with his dead.

He laughed aloud, — a merciless little laugh, — at one point in the night, to note how even this blow, rending as it did the very ground beneath his feet, had yet left quite untouched and untamed his irresistible instinct towards self-analysis. Not a single one of the innumerable, and in many cases astounding, thoughts that passed through his mind, but he watched it, and isolated it, and played with it, — just in the old way.

Luke was not by any means struck dumb or

paralyzed by this event. His intelligence had never been more acute, or his senses more responsive, than they remained through those long hours of watching.

It is true he could neither eat nor sleep. The influence of the motionless figure beside him seemed to lie in a vivid and abnormal stimulation of all his intellectual faculties.

Not a sound arose from the sleeping house, from the darkened fields, from the distant village, but he noted it and made a mental record of its cause. He kept two candles alight at his brother's head, three times refilling the candlesticks, as though the guttering and hissing of the dwindling flames would tease and disturb the dead.

He had been careful to push the two windows of the room wide open; but the night was so still that not a breath of wind entered to make the candles flicker, or to lift the edge of the white sheet stretched beneath his brother's bandaged chin. This horrible bandage, — one of the little incidents that Luke marked as unexpectedly ghastly, — seemed to slip its knot at a certain moment, causing the dead man's mouth to fall open, in a manner that made the watcher shudder, so suggestive did it seem of one about to utter a cry for help.

Luke noted, as another factor in the phenomena of death, the peculiar nature of the coldness of his brother's skin, as he bent down once and again to touch his forehead. It was different from the coldness of water or ice or marble. It was a clammy coldness; the coldness of a substance that was neither — in the words of the children's game — "animal, vegetable, nor mineral."

Luke remembered the story of that play of Webster's, in which the unhappy heroine, in the blank darkness of her dungeon, is presented with a dead hand to caress. The abominably wicked wish crossed his mind once, as he unclosed those stark fingers, that he could cause the gentle Lacrima, whom he regarded, — not altogether fairly, — as responsible for his brother's death, to feel the touch of such a hand.

There came over him, at other times, as he inhaled the cool, hushed air from the slumbering fields, and surveyed the great regal planet, — Mr. Romer's star, he thought grimly, — as it hung so formidably close to the silvery pallid moon, a queer dreamy feeling that the whole thing were a scene in a play or a story, absolutely unreal; and that he would only have to rouse himself and shake off the unnatural spell, to have his brother with him again, alive and in full consciousness.

The odd thing about it was that he found himself refusing to believe that this was his brother at all, — this mask beneath the white sheet, — and even fancying that at any moment the familiar voice might call to him from the garden, and he have to descend to unlock the door.

That thought of his brother's voice sent a pang through him of sick misgiving. Surely it couldn't be possible, that never, not through the whole of eternity, would he hear that voice again?

He moved to the window and listened. Owls were hooting somewhere up at Wild Pine, and from the pastures towards Hullaway came the harsh cry of a night-jar.

He gazed up at the glittering heavens, sprinkled

with those proud constellations whose identity it was one of his pastimes to recognize. How little they cared! How appallingly little they cared! What a farce, what an obscene, unpardonable farce, the whole business was!

He caught the sound of an angry bark in some distant yard.

Luke cursed the irrelevant intrusive noise. "Ah! thou vile Larva!" he muttered. "What! Shall a dog, a cat, a rat, have life; and thou no breath at all?"

He leant far out of the window, breathing the perfumes of the night. He noticed, as an interesting fact, that it was neither the phloxes nor the late roses whose scent filled the air, but that new exotic tobacco-plant, — a thing whose sticky, quickly-fading, trumpet-shaped petals were one of his brother's especial aversions.

The immense spaces of the night, as they carried his gaze onward from one vast translunar sign to another, filled him with a strange feeling of the utter unimportance of any earthly event. The Mythology of Power and the Mythology of Sacrifice might wrestle in desperate contention for the mastery; but what mattered, in view of this great dome which overshadowed them, the victory or the defeat of either? Mythologies were they both; both woven out of the stuff of dreams, and both vanishing like dreams, in the presence of this stark image upon the bed!

He returned to his brother's side, and rocked himself up and down on his creaking bedroom chair. "Dead and gone!" he muttered, "dead and gone!"

It was easy to deal in vague mystic speculation.

But what relief could he derive, he who wanted his brother back as he was, with his actual tones, and ways and looks, from any problematic chance that some thin "spiritual principle," or ideal wraith, of the man were now wandering through remote, unearthly regions? The darling of his soul — the heart of his heart — had become forever this appalling waxen image, this thing that weighed upon him with its presence!

Luke bent over the dead man. What a personality, what a dominant and oppressive personality, a corpse has! It is not the personality of the living man, but another — a quite different one — masquerading in his place.

Luke felt almost sure that this husk, this shell, this mockery of the real James, was possessed of some detestable consciousness of its own, a consciousness as remote from that of the man he loved as that pallid forehead with the deep purple gash across it, was remote from the dear head whose form he knew so well. How crafty, how malignant, a corpse was!

He returned to his uncomfortable chair and pondered upon what this loss meant to him. It was like the burying alive of half his being. How could he have thoughts, sensations, feelings, fancies; how could he have loves and hates, without James to tell them to? A cold sick terror of life passed through him, of life without this companion of his soul. He felt like a child lost in some great forest.

"Daddy James! Daddy James!" he cried, "I want you; — I want you!"

He found himself repeating this infantile conjuration over and over again. He battered with clenched

hand upon the adamantine wall of silence. But there was neither sign nor voice nor token nor "any that regarded." There was only the beating of his own heart and the ticking of the watch upon the table. And all the while, with its malignant cunning, the corpse regarded him, mute, derisive, contemptuous.

He thought, lightly and casually, as one who at the grave of all he loves plucks a handful of flowers, of the girls he had just parted from, and of Gladys and all his other infatuations. How impossible it seemed to him that a woman — a girl — that any one of these charming, distracting creatures — should strike a man down by their loss, as he was now stricken down.

He tried to imagine what he would feel if it were Annie lying there, under the sheet, in place of James. He would be sorry; he would be bitterly sad; he would be angry with the callous heavens; but as long as James were near, as long as James were by his side, — his life would still be his life. He would suffer, and the piteous tragedy of the thing would smite and sicken him; but it would not be the same. It would not be like this!

What was there in the love of a man that made the loss of it — for him at least — so different a thing? Was it that with women, however much one loved them, there was something equivocal, evasive, intangible; something made up of illusion and sorcery, of magic and moonbeams; that since it could never be grasped as firmly as the other, could never be as missed as the other, when the grasp had to relax? Or was it that, for all their clear heads, — heads so much clearer than poor James'! — and for

all their spiritual purity, — there was lacking in them a certain indescribable mellowness of sympathy, a certain imaginative generosity and tolerance, which meant the true secret of the life lived in common?

From the thought of his girls, Luke's mind wandered back to the thought of what the constant presence of his brother as a background to his life had really meant. Even as he sat there, gazing so hopelessly at the image on the bed, he found himself on the point of resolving to explain all these matters to James and hear his opinion upon them.

By degrees, as the dawn approached, the two blank holes into cavernous darkness which the windows of the chamber had become, changed their character. A faint whitish-blue transparency grew visible within their enclosing frames, and something ghostly and phantom-like, the stealthy invasion of a new presence, glided into the room.

This palpable presence, the frail embryo of a new day, gave to the yellow candle-flames a queer sickly pallor and intensified to a chalky opacity the dead whiteness of the sheet, and of the folded hands resting upon it. It was with the sound of the first twittering birds, and the first cock-crow, that the ice-cold spear of desolation pierced deepest of all into Luke's heart. He shivered, and blew out the candles.

A curious feeling possessed him that, in a sudden ghastly withdrawal, that other James, the James he had been turning to all night in tacit familiar appeal, had receded far out of his reach. From indistinct horizons his muffled voice moaned for a while, like the wind in the willows of Lethe, and then died away

in a thin long-drawn whisper. Luke was alone; alone with his loss and alone with the image of death.

He moved to the window and looked out. Streaks of watery gold were already visible above the eastern uplands, and a filmy sea of white mist swayed and fluttered over the fields.

All these things together, the white mist, the white walls of the room, the white light, the white covering on the body, seemed to fall upon the worn-out watcher with a weight of irresistible finality. James was dead — "gone to his death-bed; — he never would come again!"

Turning his back wearily upon those golden sky-streaks, that on any other occasion would have thrilled him with their magical promise, Luke observed the dead bodies of no less than five large moths grouped around the extinct candles. Two of them were "currant-moths," one a "yellow under-wing," and the others beyond his entomological knowledge. This was the only holocaust, then, allowed to the dead man. Five moths! And the Milky Way had looked down upon their destruction with the same placidity as upon the cause of the vigil that slew them.

Luke felt a sudden desire to escape from this room, every object of which bore now, in dimly obscure letters, the appalling handwriting of the ministers of fate. He crept on tiptoe to the door and opened it stealthily. Making a mute valedictory gesture towards the bed, he shut the door behind him and slipped down the little creaking stairs.

He entered his landlady's kitchen, and as silently

as he could collected a bundle of sticks and lit the fire. The crackling flames produced an infinitesimal lifting of the cloud which weighed upon his spirit. He warmed his hands before the blaze. From some remote depth within him, there began to awake once more the old inexpugnable zest for life.

Piling some pieces of coal upon the burning wood and drawing the kettle to the edge of the hob, he left the kitchen; and crossing the little hall, impregnated with a thin sickly odor of lamp-oil, he shot back the blots of the house-door, and let himself out into the morning air.

A flock of starlings fluttered away over the meadow, and from the mist-wreathed recesses of Nevilton House gardens came the weird defiant scream of a peacock.

He glanced furtively, as if such a glance were almost sacrilegious, at the open windows of his brother's room; and then pushing open the garden-gate emerged into the dew-drenched field. He could not bring himself to leave the neighbourhood of the house, but began pacing up and down the length of the meadow, from the hedge adjacent to the railway, to that elm-shadowed corner, where not so many weeks ago he had distracted himself with Annie and Phyllis. He continued this reiterated pacing, — his tired brain giving itself up to the monotony of a heart-easing movement, — until the sun had risen quite high above the horizon. The great fiery orb pleased him well, in its strong indifference, as with its lavish beams it dissipated the mist and touched the tree-trunks with ruddy colour.

"Ha!" he cried aloud, "the sun is the only God!

To the sun must all flesh turn, if it would live and not die!"

Half ashamed of this revival of his spirits he obeyed the beckoning gestures of the station-master's wife, who now appeared at the door.

The good woman's sympathy, though not of the silent or tactful order, was well adapted to prevent the immediate return of any hopeless grief.

"'Tis good it were a Saturday when the Lord took him," she said, pouring out for her lodger a steaming cup of excellent tea, and buttering a slice of bread; "he'll have Sunday to lie up in. It be best of all luck for these poor stiff ones, to have church bells rung over 'em."

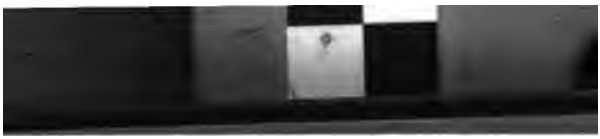
"I pray Heaven I shan't have any visitors today," remarked Luke, sipping his tea and stretching out his feet to the friendly blaze.

"That ye'll be sure to have!" answered the woman; "and the sooner ye puts on a decent black coat, and washes and brushes up a bit, the better 'twill be for all concerned. I always tells my old man that when he do fall stiff, like what your brother be, I shall put on my black silk gown and sit in the front parlour with a bottle of elder wine, ready for all sorts and conditions."

Luke rose, with a piece of bread-and-butter in his hand, and surveyed himself in the mirror.

"Yes, I do need a bit of tidying," he said. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind my shaving down here?"

Even as he spoke the young stone-carver could not help recalling those sinister stories of dead men whose beards have grown in their coffins. The landlady nodded.



"I'll make 'ee up a bed for these 'ere days," she said, "in Betty's room. As for shaving and such like, please yourself, Master Luke. This house be thy house with him lying up there."

Between nine and ten o'clock Luke's first visitor made his appearance. This was Mr. Clavering, who showed himself neither surprised nor greatly pleased to find the bereft brother romping with the children under the station-master's apple-trees.

"I cannot express to you the sympathy I feel," said the clergyman, "with your grief under this great blow. Words on these occasions are of little avail. But I trust you know where to turn for true consolation."

"Thank you, sir," replied Luke, who, though carefully shaved and washed, still wore the light grey flannel suit of his Saturday's excursion.

"Give Mr. Clavering an apple, Lizzie!" he added.

"I wouldn't for a moment," continued the Reverend Hugh, "intrude upon you with any impertinent questions. But I could not help wondering as I walked through the village how this tragedy would affect you. I prayed it might," — here he laid a grave and pastoral hand on the young man's arm, — "I prayed it might give you a different attitude to those high matters which we have at various times discussed together. Am I right in my hope, Luke?"

Never had the superb tactlessness of Nevilton's vicar betrayed him more deplorably.

"Death is death, Mr. Clavering," replied the stone-carver, lifting up the youngest of the children and placing her astride on an apple-branch. "It's about the worst blow fate's ever dealt me. But when

it comes to any change in my ideas, — no! I can't say that I've altered."

"I understand you weren't with him when this terrible thing happened," said the clergyman. "They tell me he was picked up by strangers. There'll be no need, I trust, for an inquest, or anything of that kind?"

Luke shook his head. "The doctor was up here last night. The thing's clear enough. His mind must have given way again. He's had those curst quarries on his nerves for a long while past. I wish to the devil — I beg your pardon, sir! — I wish I'd taken him to Weymouth with me. I was a fool not to insist on that."

"Yes, I heard you were away," remarked Hugh, with a certain caustic significance in his tone. "One or two of our young friends were with you, I believe?"

Luke did not fail to miss the implication, and he hit back vindictively.

"I understand you've had an interesting little service this morning, sir, or perhaps it's yet to come off? I can't help being a bit amused when I think of it!"

An electric shock of anger thrilled through Clavering's frame. Controlling himself with a heroic effort, he repelled the malignant taunt.

"I didn't know you concerned yourself with these observances, Andersen," he remarked. "But you're quite right. I've just this minute come from receiving Miss Romer into our church. Miss Traffio was with her. Both young ladies were greatly agitated over this unhappy occurrence. In fact it cast quite a gloom over what otherwise is one of the most beautiful incidents of all, in our ancient ritual."

Luke swung the little girl on the bough backwards and forwards. The other children, retired to a discreet distance, stared at the colloquy with wide-open eyes.

"This baptizing of adults," continued Luke, — "you call 'em adults, don't you, on these occasions? — is really a little funny, isn't it?"

"Funny!" roared the angry priest. "No, sir, it isn't funny! The saving of an immortal soul by God's most sacred sacrament may not appeal to you infidels as an essential ceremony, — but only a thoroughly vulgar and philistine mind could call it funny!"

"I'm afraid we shall never agree on these topics, Mr. Clavering," replied Luke calmly. "But it was most kind of you to come up and see me. I really appreciate it. Would it be possible," — his voice took a lower and graver tone, — "for my brother's funeral to be performed on Wednesday? I should be very grateful to you, sir, if that could be arranged."

The young vicar frowned and looked slightly disconcerted. "What time would you wish it to be, Andersen?" he enquired. "I ask you this, because Wednesday is — er — unfortunately — the date fixed for another of these ceremonies that you scoff at. The Lord Bishop comes to Nevilton then. It is his own wish. I should myself have preferred a later date."

"Ha! the confirmation!" ejaculated Luke, with a bitter little laugh. "You're certainly bent on striking while the iron's hot, Mr. Clavering. May I ask what hour has been fixed for *this* beautiful ceremony?"

"Eleven o'clock in the morning," replied the priest,

ignoring with a dignified wave of his hand the stone-carver's jeering taunt.

"Well then — if that suits you — and does not interfere with the Lord Bishop —" said Luke, "I should be most grateful if you could make the hour for James' funeral, ten o'clock in the morning? *That* service I happen to be more familiar with than the others, — and I know it doesn't take very long."

Mr. Clavering bent his head in assent.

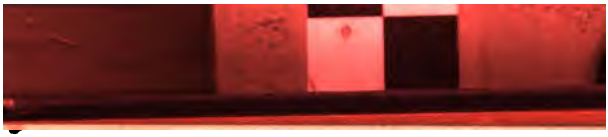
"It shall certainly be as you wish," he said. "If unforeseen difficulties arise, I will let you know. But I have no doubt it can be managed.

"I am right in assuming," he added, a little uneasily, "that your brother was a baptized member of our church?"

Luke lifted the child from the bough and made her run off to play with the others. The glance he then turned upon the vicar of Nevilton was not one of admiration.

"James was the noblest spirit I've ever known," he said sternly. "If there is such a thing as another world, he is certain to reach it — church or no church. As a matter of fact, if it is at all important to you, he was baptized in Nevilton. You'll find his name in the register — and mine too!" he added with a laugh.

Mr. Clavering kept silence, and moved towards the gate. Luke followed him, and at the gate they shook hands. Perhaps the same thought passed through the minds of both of them, as they went through this ceremony; for a very queer look, almost identical in its expression on either face, was exchanged between them.



Before the morning was over Luke had a second visit of condolence. This was from Mr. Quincunx, and never had the quaint recluse been more warmly received. Luke was conscious at once that here was a man who could enter into every one of his feelings, and be neither horrified nor scandalized by the most fantastic inconsistency.

The two friends walked up and down the sunny field in front of the house, Luke pouring into the solitary's attentive ears every one of his recent impressions and sensations.

Mr. Quincunx was evidently profoundly moved by James' death. He refused Luke's offer to let him visit the room upstairs, but his refusal was expressed in such a natural and characteristic manner that the stone-carver accepted it in perfect good part.

After a while they sat down together under the shady hedge at the top of the meadow. Here they discoursed and philosophized at large, listening to the sound of the church-bells and watching the slow-moving cattle. It was one of those unruffled Sunday mornings, when, in such places as this, the drowsiness of the sun-warmed leaves and grasses seems endowed with a kind of consecrated calm, the movements of the horses and oxen grow solemn and ritualistic, the languor of the heavy-winged butterflies appears holy, and the stiff sabbatical dresses of the men and women who shuffle so demurely to and fro, seem part of a patient liturgical observance.

Luke loved Mr. Quincunx that morning. The recluse was indeed precisely in his element. Living habitually himself in thoughts of death, pleased — in that incomparable sunshine — to find himself still

alive, cynical and yet considerate, mystical and yet humorous, he exactly supplied what the wounded heart of the pagan mourner required for its comfort.

"Idiots! asses! fools!" the stone-carver ejaculated, apostrophizing in his inmost spirit the various persons, clever or otherwise, to whom this nervous and eccentric creature was a mere type of failure and superannuation. None of these others, — not one of them, — not Romer nor Dangelis nor Clavering nor Taxater — could for a moment have entered into the peculiar feelings which oppressed him. As for Gladys or Phyllis or Annie or Polly, — he would have as soon thought of relating his emotions to a row of swallows upon a telegraph-wire as to any of those dainty epitomes of life's evasiveness!

A man's brain, a man's imagination, a man's scepticism, was what he wanted; but he wanted it touched with just that flavour of fanciful sentiment of which the Nevilton hermit was a master. A hundred quaint little episodes, the import of which none but Mr. Quincunx could have appreciated, were evoked by the stone-carver. Nothing was too blasphemous, nothing too outrageous, nothing too bizarre, for the solitary's taste. On the other hand, he entered with tender and perfect clairvoyance into the sick misery of loss which remained the background of all Luke's sensations.

The younger man's impetuous confidences ebbed and dwindled at last; and with the silence of the church-bells and the receding to the opposite corner of the field of the browsing cattle, a deep and melancholy hush settled upon them both.

Then it was that Mr. Quincunx began speaking of

himself and his own anxieties. In the tension of the moment he even went so far as to disclose to Luke, under a promise of absolute secrecy, the sinister story of that contract into which Lacrima had entered with their employer.

Luke was all attention at once. This was indeed a piece of astounding news! He couldn't have said whether he wondered more at the quixotic devotion of Lacrima for this quaint person, or at the solitary's unprecedented candour in putting him "en rapport" with such an amazing situation.

"Of course we know," murmured Mr. Quincunx, in his deep subterranean voice, "that she wouldn't have promised such a thing, unless in her heart she had been keen, at all costs, to escape from those people. It isn't human nature to give up everything for nothing. Probably, as a matter of fact, she rather likes the idea of having a house of her own. I expect she thinks she could twist that fool Goring round her finger; and I daresay she could! But the thing is, what do you advise *me* to do? Of course I'm glad enough to agree to anything that saves me from this damnable office. But what worries me about it is that devil Romer put it into her head. I don't trust him, Luke; I don't trust him!"

"I should think you don't!" exclaimed his companion, looking with astonishment and wonder into the solemn grey eyes fixed sorrowfully and intently upon his own. What a strange thing, he thought to himself, that this subtle-minded intelligence should be so hopelessly devoid of the least push of practical impetus.

"Of course," Mr. Quincunx continued, "neither

you nor I would fuss ourselves much over the idea of a girl being married to a fool like this, if there weren't something different from the rest about her. This nonsense about their having to 'love,' as the little simpletons call it, the man they agree to live with, is of course all tommy-rot. No one 'loves' the person they live with. She wouldn't love me, — she'd probably hate me like poison, — after the first week or so! The romantic idiots who make so much of 'love,' and are so horrified when these little creatures are married without it, don't understand what this planet is made of. They don't understand the feelings of the girls either.

"I tell you a girl *likes* being made a victim of in this particular kind of way. They're much less fastidious, when it comes to the point, than we are. As a matter of fact what does trouble them is being married to a man they really have a passion for. Then, jealousy bites through their soft flesh like Cleopatra's serpent, and all sorts of wild ideas get into their heads. It's not natural, Luke, it's not natural, for girls to marry persons they love! That's why we country dogs treat the whole thing as a lewd jest.

"Do you think these honest couples who stand giggling and smirking before our dear clergyman every quarter, don't hate one another in their hearts? Of course they do; it wouldn't be nature if they didn't! But that doesn't say they don't get their pleasure out of it. And Lacrima'll get her pleasure, in some mad roundabout fashion, from marrying Goring, — you may take my word for that!"

"It seems to me," remarked Luke slowly, "that you're trying all this time to quiet your conscience.

I believe you've really got far more conscience, Maurice, than I have. It's your conscience that makes you speak so loud, at this very moment!"

Mr. Quincunx got up on his feet and stroked his beard. "I'm afraid I've annoyed you somehow," he remarked. "No person ever speaks of another person's conscience unless he's in a rage with him."

The stone-carver stretched out his legs and lit a cigarette. "Sit down again, you old fool," he said, "and let's talk this business over sensibly."

The recluse sighed deeply, and, subsiding into his former position, fixed a look of hopeless melancholy upon the sunlit landscape.

"The point is this, Maurice," began the young man. "The first thing in these complicated situations is to be absolutely certain what one wants oneself. It seems to me that a good deal of your agitation comes from the fact that you haven't made up your mind what you want. You asked my advice, you know, so you won't be angry if I'm quite plain with you?"

"Go on," said Mr. Quincunx, a remote flicker of his goblin-smile twitching his nostrils, "I see I'm in for a few little hits."

Luke waved his hand. "No hits, my friend, no hits. All I want to do, is to find out from you what you really feel. One philosophizes, naturally, about girls marrying, and so on; but the point is, — do you want this particular young lady for yourself, or don't you?"

Mr. Quincunx stroked his beard. "Well," — he said meditatively, "if it comes to that, I suppose I do want her. We're all fools in some way or other, I

fancy. Yes, I do want her, Luke, and that's the honest truth. But I don't want to have to work twice as hard as I'm doing now, and under still more unpleasant conditions, to keep her!"

Luke emitted a puff of smoke and knocked the ashes from his cigarette upon the purple head of a tall knapweed.

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "Now we've got something to go upon."

Mr. Quincunx surveyed the faun-like profile of his friend with some apprehension. He mentally resolved that nothing, — nothing in heaven nor earth, — should put him to the agitation of making any drastic change in his life.

"We get back then," continued Luke, "to the point we reached on our walk to Seven Ashes."

As he said the words "Seven Ashes" the ice-cold finger of memory pierced him with that sudden stab which is like a physical blow. What did it matter, after all, he thought, what happened to any of these people, now Daddy James was dead?

"You remember," he went on, while the sorrowful grey eyes of his companion regarded him with wistful anxiety, "you told me, in that walk, that if some imaginary person were to leave you money enough to live comfortably, you would marry Lacrima without any hesitation?"

Mr. Quincunx nodded.

"Well,"—Luke continued—"in return for your confession about that contract, I'll confess to you that Mr. Taxater and I formed a plan together, when my brother first got ill, to secure you this money."

Mr. Quincunx made a grimace of astonishment.

"The plan has lapsed now," went on Luke, "owing to Mr. Taxater's being away; but I can't help feeling that something of that kind might be done. I feel in a queer sort of fashion," he added, "though I can't quite tell you why, that, after all, things'll so work themselves out, that you *will* get both the girl and the money!"

Mr. Quincunx burst into a fit of hilarious merriment, and rubbed his hands together. But a moment later his face clouded.

"It's impossible," he murmured with a deep sigh; "it's impossible, Luke. Girls and gold go together like butterflies and sunshine. I'm as far from either, as the sea-weed under the arch of Weymouth Bridge."

Luke pondered for a moment in silence.

"It's an absurd superstition," he finally remarked, "but I can't help a sort of feeling that James' spirit is actively exerting itself on your side. He was a romantic old truepenny, and his last thoughts were all fixed — of that I'm sure — upon Lacrima's escaping this marriage with Goring."

Mr. Quincunx sighed. He had vaguely imagined the possibility of some grand diplomatic stroke on his behalf, from the astute Luke; and this relapse into mysticism, on the part of that sworn materialist, did not strike him as reassuring.

The silence that fell between them was broken by the sudden appearance of a figure familiar to them both, crossing the field towards them. It was Witch-Bessie, who, in a bright new shawl, and with a mysterious packet clutched in her hand, was beckoning to attract their attention. The men rose and advanced to meet her.

"I'll sit down a bit with 'ee," cried the old woman, waving to them to return to their former position.

When they were seated once more beneath the bank, — the old lady, like some strange Peruvian idol, resting cross-legged at their feet, — she began, without further delay, to explain the cause of her visit.

"I know'd how 'twould be with 'ee," she said, addressing Luke, but turning a not unfriendly eye upon his companion. "I did know well how 'twould be. I hear'd tell of brother's being laid out, from Bert Leerd, as I traipsed through Wild Pine this morning.

"Ninsy Lintot was a-cryin' enough to break her poor heart. I hear'd 'un as I doddered down yon lane. She were all lonesome-like, under them girt trees, shakin' and sobbin' terrible. She took on so, when I arst what ailed 'un, that I dursn't lay finger on the lass.

"She did right down scare I, Master Luke, and that's God's holy truth! 'Let me bide, Bessie,' says she, 'let me bide.' I telled her 'twas a sin to He she loved best, to carry on so hopeless; and with that she up and says, — 'I be the cause of it all, Bessie,' says she, 'I be the cause he throw'd 'isself away.' And with that she set herself cryin' again, like as 'twas pitiful to hear. 'My darlin', my darlin',' she kept callin' out. 'I love no soul 'cept thee — no soul 'cept thee!'

" 'Twas then I recollected wot my old Mother used to say, 'bout maids who be cryin' like pantin' hares. 'Listen to me, Ninsy Lintot,' I says, solemn and slow,

like as us were in church. 'One above's been talking wi' I, this blessed morn, and He do say as Master James be in Abram's Bosom, with them shining ones, and it be shame and sin for mortals like we to wish 'un back.'

"That quieted the lass a bit, and I did tell she then, wot be God's truth, that 'tweren't her at all turned brother's head, but the pleasure of the Almighty. ''Tis for folks like us,' I says to her, 'to take wot His will do send, and bide quiet and still, same as cows, drove to barton.'

"'Twere a blessing of providence I'd met crazy Bert afore I seed the lass, else I'd a been struck dazed-like by wot she did tell. But as 'twas, thanks be to recollectin' mother's trick wi' such wendy maids, I dried her poor eyes and got her back home along. And she gave I summat to put in brother's coffin afore they do nail 'un down."

Before either Luke or Mr. Quincunx had time to utter any comment upon this narration, Witch-Bessie unfastened the packet she was carrying, and produced from a cardboard box a large roughly-moulded bracelet, or bangle, of heavy silver, such as may be bought in the bazaars of Tunis or Algiers.

"There," cried the old woman, holding the thing up, and flashing it in the sun, "that's wot she gave I, to bury long wi' brother! Be pretty enough, baint 'un? Though, may-be, not fittin' for a quiet home-keeping lass like she. She had 'un off some Gipoo, she said; and to my thinkin' it be a kind of heathen ornimint, same as folks do buy at Rogertown Fair. But such as 'tis, that be wot 'tis bestowed for, to put i' the earth long wi' brother. Seems

somethin' of a pity, maybe, but maid's whimsies be maids' whimsies, and God Almighty'll plague the hard-hearted folk as won't perform wot they do cry out for."

Luke took the bangle from the old woman's hand.

"Of course I'll do what she wants, Bessie," he said. "Poor little Ninsy, I never knew how much she cared."

He permitted Mr. Quincunx to handle the silver object, and then carefully placed it in his pocket.

"Hullo!" he cried, "what else have you got, Bessie?" This exclamation was caused by the fact that Witch-Bessie, after fumbling in her shawl had produced a second mysterious packet, smaller than the first and tightly tied round with the stalks of some sort of hedge-weed.

"Cards, by Heaven!" exclaimed Luke. "Oh Bessie, Bessie," he added, "why didn't you bring these round here twenty-four hours ago? You might have made me take him with me to Weymouth!"

Untying the packet, which contained as the stone-carver had anticipated, a pack of incredibly dirty cards, the old woman without a word to either of them, shuffled and sifted them, according to some secret rule, and laid aside all but nine. These, almost, but not entirely, consisting of court cards, she spread out in a carefully concerted manner on the grass at her feet.

Muttering over them some extraordinary gibberish, out of which the two men could only catch the following words,

"Higgory, diggory, digg'd
My sow has pigg'd.
There's a good card for thee.
There's a still better than he!
There is the best of all three,
And there is Niddy-noddee!"—

Witch-Bessie picked up these nine cards, and shuffled them long and fast.

She then handed them to Luke, face-downward, and bade him draw seven out of the nine. These she once more arranged, according to some occult plan, upon the grass, and pondered over them with wrinkled brow.

"'Tis as 'twould be!" she muttered at last. "Cards be wonderful crafty, though toads and efties, to my thinkin', be better, and a viper's 'innards be God's very truth."

Making, to Luke's great disappointment, no further allusion to the result of her investigations, the old woman picked up the cards and went through the whole process again, in honour of Mr. Quincunx.

This time, after bending for several minutes over the solitary's choice, she became more voluble.

"Thy heart's wish be thine, dearie," she said. "But there be thwartings and blastings. Three tears — three kisses — and a terrible journey. Us shan't have 'ee long wi' we, in these 'ere parts. Thee be marked and signed, master, by fallin' stars and flyin' birds. There's good sound wood gone to ship's keel wot'll carry thee fast and far. Blastings and thwartings! But thy heart's wish be thine, dearie."

The humourous nostrils of Mr. Quincunx and the expressive curves of his bearded chin had twitched and quivered as this sorcery began, but the old

woman's reference to a "terrible journey" clouded his countenance with blank dismay.

Luke pressed the sybil to be equally communicative with regard to his own fate, but the old woman gathered up her cards, twisted the same faded stalks round the packet, and returned it to the folds of her shawl. Then she struggled up upon her feet.

"Don't leave us yet, Bessie," said Luke. "I'll bring you out something to eat presently."

Witch-Bessie's only reply to this hospitable invitation was confounding in its irrelevance. She picked up her draggled skirt with her two hands, displaying her unlaced boots and rumpled stockings, and then, throwing back her wizened head, with its rusty weather-bleached bonnet, and emitting a pallid laugh from her toothless gums, she proceeded to tread a sort of jerky measure, moving her old feet to the tune of a shrill ditty.

"Now we dance looby, looby, looby,
Now we dance looby, looby, light;
Shake your right hand a little,
Shake your left hand a little,
And turn you round about."

"Ye'll both see I again, present," she panted, when this performance was over, "but bide where 'ee be, bide where 'ee be now. Old Bessie's said her say, and she be due long of Hullaway Cross, come noon."

As she hobbled off to the neighbouring stile, Luke saw her kiss the tips of her fingers in the direction of the station-master's house.

"She's bidding Daddy James good-bye," he thought. "What a world! 'Looby, looby, looby!' A proper Dance of Death for a son of my mother!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GRANARY

LUKE persuaded Mr. Quincunx to stay with him for the station-master's Sunday dinner, and to stroll with him down to the churchyard in the afternoon to decide, in consultation with the sexton, upon the most suitable spot for his brother's interment. The stone-carver was resolved that this spot should be removed as far as possible from the grave of their parents, and the impiety of this resolution was justified by the fact that Gideon's tomb was crowded on both sides by less aggressive sleepers.

They finally selected a remote place under the southern wall, at the point where the long shadow of the tower, in the late afternoon, flung its clear-outlined battlements on the waving grass.

Luke continued to be entirely pleased with Mr. Quincunx's tact and sympathy. He felt he could not have secured a better companion for this task of selecting the final resting-place of the brother of his soul. "Curse these fools," he thought, "who rail against this excellent man!" What mattered it, after all, that the fellow hated what the world calls "work," and loved a peaceful life removed from distraction?

The noble attributes of humour, of imagination, of intelligence, — how much more important they were, and conducive to the general human happiness, than

the mere power of making money! Compared with the delicious twists and diverting convolutions in Mr. Quincunx's extraordinary brain, how dull, how insipid, seemed such worldly cleverness!

The death of his brother had had the effect of throwing these things into a new perspective. The Machiavellian astuteness, which, in himself, in Romer, in Mr. Taxater, and in many others, he had, until now, regarded as of supreme value in the conduct of life, seemed to him, as he regretfully bade the recluse farewell and retraced his steps, far less essential, far less important, than this imaginative sensitiveness to the astounding spectacle of the world.

He fancied he discerned in front of him, as he left the churchyard, the well-known figure of his newly affianced Annie, and he made a detour through the lane, to avoid her. He felt at that moment as though nothing in the universe were interesting or important except the sympathetic conversation of the friends of one's natural choice — persons of that small, that fatally small circle, from which just now the centre seemed to have dropped out!

Girls were a distraction, a pastime, a lure, an intoxication; but a shock like this, casting one back upon life's essential verities, threw even lust itself into the limbo of irrelevant things. All his recent preoccupation with the love of women seemed to him now, as though, in place of dreaming over the mystery of the great tide of life, hand in hand with initiated comrades, he were called upon to go launching little paper-boats on its surface, full of fretful anxiety as to whether they sank or floated.

Weighed down by the hopeless misery of his loss,

he made his way slowly back to the station-master's house, too absorbed in his grief to speak to anyone.

After tea he became so wretched and lonely, that he decided to walk over to Hullaway on the chance of getting another glimpse of Witch-Bessie. Even the sympathy of the station-master's wife got on his nerves and the romping of the children fretted and chafed him.

He walked fast, swinging his stick and keeping his eyes on the ground, his heart empty and desolate. He followed the very path by which Gladys and he, some few short weeks before, had returned in the track of their two friends, from the Hullaway stocks.

Arriving at the village green, with its pond, its elms, its raised pavement, and its groups of Sunday loiterers, he turned into the churchyard. As we have noted many times ere now, the appealing silence of these places of the dead had an invincible charm for him. It was perhaps a morbid tendency inherited from his mother, or, on the other hand, it may have been a pure æsthetic whim of his own, that led him, with so magnetic an attraction, towards these oases of mute patience, in the midst of the diurnal activities; but whatever the spell was, Luke had never found more relief in obeying it than he did at this present hour.

He sat down in their favourite corner and looked with interest at the various newly-blown wild-flowers, which a few weeks' lapse had brought to light. How well he loved the pungent stringy stalks, the grey leaves, the flat sturdy flowers of the "achillea" or "yarrow"! Perhaps, above all the late summer blooms,

he preferred these — finding, in their very coarseness of texture and toughness of stem, something that reassured and fortified. They were so bitter in their herbal fragrance, so astringent in the tang of their pungent taste, that they suggested to him the kind of tonic cynicism, the sort of humorous courage and gay disdain, with which it was his constant hope to come at last to accept life.

It pleased him, above all when he found these plants tinged with a delicious pink, as though the juice of raspberries had been squeezed over them, and it was precisely this tint he noticed now in a large clump of them, growing on the sun-warmed grave of a certain Hugh and Constance Foley, former occupants of the old Manor House behind him.

He wondered if this long-buried Hugh — a mysterious and shadowy figure, about whom James and he had often woven fantastic histories — had felt as forlorn as he felt now, when he lost his Constance. Could a Constance, or an Annie, or a Phyllis, ever leave quite the void behind them such as now ached and throbbed within him? Yes, he supposed so. Men planted their heart's loves in many various soils, and when the hand of fate tugged them away, it mattered little whether it was chalk, or sand, or loam, that clung about the roots!

He looked long and long at the sunlit mounds, over which the tombstones leaned at every conceivable angle and upon which some had actually fallen prostrate. These neglected monuments, and these tall uncut grasses and flowers, had always seemed to him preferable to the trim neatness of an enclosure

like that of Athelston, which resembled the lawn of a gentleman's house.

James had often disputed with him on this point, arguing, in a spirit of surly contradiction, in favour of the wondrous effect of those red Athelston roses hanging over clear-mown turf. The diverse suggestiveness of graveyards was one of the brother's best-loved topics, and innumerable cigarettes had they both consumed, weighing this subject, on this very spot.

Once more the hideous finality of the thing pierced the heart of Luke with a devastating pang. On Wednesday next, — that is, after the lapse of two brief days, — he would bid farewell, for ever and ever and ever, to the human companion with whom he had shared all he cared for in life!

He remembered a little quarrel he once had with James, long ago, in this very place, and how it had been the elder and not the younger who had made the first overtures of reconciliation, and how James had given him an old pair of silver links, — he was wearing them at that moment! — as a kind of peace-offering. He recollected what a happy evening they had spent together after that event, and how they had read "Thus spake Zarathustra" in the old formidable English translation — the mere largeness of the volume answering to the largeness of the philosopher's thought.

Never again would they two "take on them," in the sweet Shakespearean phrase, "the mystery of things, as though they were God's spies."

Luke set himself to recall, one by one, innumerable little incidents of their life together. He remembered

various occasions in which, partly out of pure contrariness, but partly also out of a certain instinctive bias in his blood, he had defended their father against his brother's attacks. He recalled one strange conversation they had had, under the withy-stumps of Badger's Bottom, as they returned through the dusk of a November day, from a long walk over the southern hills. It had to do with the appearance of a cloud-swept crescent moon above the Auber woods.

James had maintained that were he a pagan of the extinct polytheistic faith, he would have worshipped the moon, and willingly offered her, night by night, — he used the pious syllables of the great hedonist, — her glittering wax tapers upon the sacred wheaten cake. Luke, on the contrary, had sworn that the sun, and no lesser power, was the god of his idolatry, and he imagined himself in place of his brother's wax candles, pouring forth, morning by morning, a rich libation of gold wine to that bright lord of life.

This instinctive division of taste between the two, had led, over and over again, to all manner of friendly dissension.

Luke recalled how often he had rallied James upon his habit of drifting into what the younger brother pertinently described as a "translunar mood." He was "translunar" enough now, at any rate; but now it was in honour of that other "lady of the night," of that dreadful "double" of his moon-goddess — the dark pomegranate-bearer — that the candles must be lit!

Luke revived in his mind, as he watched the slow-shifting shadows move from grave to grave, all those

indescribable "little things" of their every-day life together, the loss of which seemed perhaps worst of all. He recalled how on gusty December evenings they would plod homeward from some Saturday afternoon's excursion to Yeoborough, and how the cheerful firelight from the station-master's house would greet them as they crossed the railway.

So closely had their thoughts and sensations grown together, that there were many little poignant memories, out of the woven texture of which he found himself quite unable to disentangle the imaginative threads that were due to his brother, from such as were the evocation of his own temperament.

One such concentrated moment, of exquisite memory, he associated with an old farm-house on the edge of the road leading from Hullaway to Rogerstown. This road, — a forlorn enough highway of Roman origin, dividing a level plain of desolate rain-flooded meadows, — was one of their favourite haunts. "Halfway House," as the farm-dwelling was called, especially appealed to them, because of its romantic and melancholy isolation.

Luke remembered how he had paused with his brother one clear frosty afternoon when the puddles by the road-side were criss-crossed by little broken stars of fresh-formed ice, and had imagined how they would feel if such a place belonged to them by hereditary birthright, what they would feel were they even now returning there, between the tall evergreens at the gate, to spend a long evening over a log fire, with mulled claret on the hob, and cards and books on the table, and a great white Persian cat, — this was James' interpolation! — purring softly, and rub-

bing its silky sides against Chinese vases full of rose-leaves.

Strange journeys his mind took, that long unforgettable afternoon, — the first of his life spent without his brother! He saw before him, at one moment, a little desolate wooden pier, broken by waves and weather, somewhere on the Weymouth coast. The indescribable pathos of things outworn and done with, of things abandoned by man and ill-used by nature, had given to this derelict pile of drift-wood a curious prominence in his House of Memory. He remembered the look with which James had regarded it, and how the wind had whistled through it and how they had tried in vain to light their cigarettes under its shelter.

At another moment his mind swung back to the daily routine in their pleasant lodging. He recalled certain spring mornings when they had risen together at dawn and had crept stealthily out, for fear of waking their landlady. He vividly remembered the peculiar smell of moss and primroses with which the air seemed full on one of these occasions.

The place Luke had chosen for summoning up all these ghosts of the past held him with such a spell that he permitted the church-bells to ring and the little congregation to assemble for the evening service without moving or stirring. "Hugh and Constance Foley" he kept repeating to himself, as the priest's voice, within the sacred building, intoned the prayers. The sentiment of the plaintive hymn with which the service closed, — he hardly moved or stirred for the brief hour of the liturgy's progress, — brought tears, the first he had shed since his brother's death,

to this wanton faun's eyes. What is there, he thought, in these wistful tunes, and impossible, too-sweet words, that must needs hit the most cynical of sceptics?

He let the people shuffle out and drift away, and the grey-haired parson and his silk-gowned wife follow them and vanish, and still he did not stir. For some half-an-hour longer he remained in the same position, his chin upon his knees, staring gloomily in front of him. He was still seated so, when, to the eyes of an observer posted on the top of the tower, two persons, the first a woman and the second a man, would have been observed approaching, by a rarely-traversed field-path, the side of the enclosure most remote from Hullaway Green.

The path upon which these figures advanced was interrupted at certain intervals by tall elm-trees, and it would have been clear to our imaginary watcher upon the tower that the second of the two was glad enough of the shelter of these trees, of which it was evident he intended to make use, did the first figure turn and glance backward.

Had such a sentinel been possessed of local knowledge he would have had no difficulty in recognizing the first of these persons as Gladys Romer and the second as Mr. Clavering.

Gladys had, in fact, gone alone to the evening service, on the ground of celebrating the close of her baptismal day. Immediately after the service she had slipped off down the street leading to the railroad, directing her steps towards Hullaway, whither a sure instinct told her Luke had wandered.

She was still in sight, having got no further than

the entrance to Splash Lane, when Clavering, who had changed his surplice with lightning rapidity, issued forth into the street. In a flash he remarked the direction of her steps, and impelled by an impulse of mad jealousy, began blindly following her.

Not a few heads were inquisitively turned, and not a few whispering comments were exchanged, as first the squire's daughter, and then the young clergyman, made their way through the street.

As soon as Gladys had crossed the railroad and struck out at a sharp pace up the slope of the meadow Clavering realized that wherever she intended to go it was not to the house in which lay James Andersen. Torn with intolerable jealousy, and anxious, at all risks, to satisfy his mind, one way or the other, as to her relations with Luke, he deliberately decided to follow the girl to whatever hoped-for encounter, or carefully plotted assignation, she was now directing her steps. How true, how exactly true, to his interpretation of Luke's character, was this astutely arranged meeting, on the very day after his brother's death!

At the top of the station-field Gladys paused for a moment, and, turning round, contemplated the little dwelling which was now a house of the dead.

Luckily for Mr. Clavering, this movement of hers coincided with his arrival at the thick-set hedge separating the field from the metal track. He waited at the turn-stile until, her abstraction over, she passed into the lane.

All the way to Hullaway Mr. Clavering followed her, hurriedly concealing himself when there seemed the least danger of discovery, and at certain critical

moments making slight deviations from the direct pursuit.

As she drew near the churchyard the girl showed evident signs of nervousness and apprehension, walking more slowly, and looking about her, and sometimes even pausing as if to take breath and collect her thoughts.

It was fortunate for her pursuer at this final moment of the chase that the row of colossal elms, of which mention has been made, interposed themselves between the two. Clavering was thus able to approach quite close to the girl before she reached her destination, for, making use of these rugged trunks, as an Indian scout might have done, he was almost within touch of her by the time she clambered over the railings.

The savage bite of insane jealousy drove from the poor priest's head any thought of how grotesque he must have appeared,—could any eyes but those of field-mice and starlings have observed him,— with his shiny black frock-coat and broad-brimmed hat, peeping and spying in the track of this fair young person.

With a countenance convulsed with helpless fury he watched the girl walk slowly and timidly up to Luke's side, and saw the stone-carver recognize her and rise to greet her. He could not catch their words, though he strained his ears to do so, but their gestures and attitudes were quite distinguishable.

It was, indeed, little wonder that the agitated priest could not overhear what Gladys said, for the extreme nervousness under which she laboured made her first utterances so broken and low that even her interlocutor could scarcely follow them.

She laid a pleading hand on Luke's arm. "I was unhappy," she murmured, "I was unhappy, and I wanted to tell you. I've been thinking about you all day. I heard of his death quite early in the morning. Luke, — you're not angry with me any more, are you? I'd have done anything that this shouldn't have happened!"

Luke looked at her searchingly, but made, at the same time, an impatient movement of his arm, so that the hand she had placed upon his sleeve fell to her side.

"Let's get away from here, Luke," she implored; "anywhere, — across the fields, — I told them at home I might go for a walk after church. It'll be all right. No one will know."

"Across the fields — eh?" replied the stone-carver. "Well — I don't mind. What do you say to a walk to Rogerstown? I haven't been there since I went with James, and there'll be a moon to get home by." He looked at her intently, with a certain bitter humour lurking in the curve of his lips.

Under ordinary circumstances it was with the utmost difficulty that Gladys could be persuaded to walk anywhere. Her lethargic nature detested that kind of exercise. He was amazed at the alacrity with which she accepted the offer.

Her eyes quite lit up. "I'd love that, Luke, I'd simply love it!" she cried eagerly. "Let's start! I'll walk as fast as you like — and I don't care how late we are!"

They moved out of the churchyard together, by the gate opening on the green.

Luke was interested, but not in the least touched,

by the girl's chastened and submissive manner. His suggestion about Rogerstown was really more of a sort of test than anything else, to see just how far this clinging passivity of hers would really go.

As they followed the lane leading out of one of the side-alleys of the village towards the Roman Road, the stone-carver could not help indulging in a certain amount of silent psychological analysis in regard to this change of heart in his fair mistress. He seemed to get a vision of the great world-passions, sweeping at random through the universe, and bending the most obsinate wills to their caprice.

On the one hand, he thought, there is that absurd Mr. Clavering, — simple, pure-minded, a veritable monk of God, — driven almost insane with Desire, and on the other, here is Gladys, — naturally as selfish and frivolous a young pagan as one could wish to amuse oneself with, — driven almost insane with self-oblivious love! They were like earthquakes and avalanches, like whirlpools and water-spouts, he thought, these great world-passions! They could overwhelm all the good in one person, and all the evil in another, with the same sublime indifference, and in themselves — remain non-moral, superhuman, elemental!

In the light of this vision, Luke could not resist a hurried mental survey of the various figures in his personal drama. He wondered how far his own love for James could be said to belong to this formidable category. No! He supposed that both he and Mr. Quincunx were too self-possessed, or too epicurean, ever to be thus swept out of their path. His brother was clearly a victim of these erotic Valkyries, so was

Ninsy Lintot, and in a lesser degree, he shrewdly surmised, young Philip Wone. He himself, he supposed, was, in these things, amourous and vicious rather than passionate. So he had always imagined Gladys to have been. But Gladys had been as completely swept out of the shallows of her viciousness, by this overpowering obsession, as Mr. Clavering had been swept out of the shallows of his puritanism, by the same power. If that fantastic theory of Vennie Seldom's about the age-long struggle between the two Hills — between the stone of the one and the wood of the other — had any germ of truth in it, it was clear that these elemental passions belonged to a region of activity remote from either, and as indifferent to both, as the great zodiacal signs were indifferent to the solar planets.

Luke had just arrived at this philosophical, or, if the reader pleases, mystical conclusion, when they emerged upon the Roman Road.

Ascending an abrupt hill, the last eminence between Hullaway and far-distant ranges, they found themselves looking down over an immense melancholy plain, in the centre of which, on the banks of a muddy river, stood the ancient Roman stronghold of Rogerstown, the birth-place, so Luke always loved to remind himself, of the famous monkish scientist Roger Bacon.

The sun had already disappeared, and the dark line of the Mendip Hills on the northern horizon were wrapped in a thick, purple haze.

The plain they looked down upon was cut into two equal segments by the straight white road they were to follow, — if Luke was serious in his intention, —

and all along the edges of the road, and spreading in transverse lines across the level fields, were deep, reedy ditches, bordered in places by pollard willows.

The whole plain, subject, in autumn and winter, to devastating floods, was really a sort of inlet or estuary of the great Somersetshire marshes, lying further west, which are collectively known as Sedgemoor.

Gladys could not refrain from giving vent to a slight movement of instinctive reluctance, when she saw how close the night was upon them, and how long the road seemed, but she submissively suppressed any word of protest, when, with a silent touch upon her arm, her companion led her forward, down the shadowy incline.

Their figures were still visible — two dark isolated forms upon the pale roadway — when, hot and panting, Mr. Clavering arrived at the same hill-top. With a sigh of profound relief he recognized that he had not lost his fugitives. The only question was, where were they going, and for what purpose? He remained for several minutes gloomy and watchful at his post of observation.

They were now nearly half a mile across the plain, and their receding figures had already begun to grow indistinct in the twilight, when Mr. Clavering saw them suddenly leave the road and debouch to the left. "Ah!" he muttered to himself, "They're going home by Hullaway Chase!"

This Hullaway Chase was a rough tract of pasturage a little to the east of the level flats, and raised slightly above them. From its southern extremity a

long narrow lane, skirting the outlying cottages of the village, led straight across the intervening uplands to Nevilton Park. It was clearly towards this lane, by a not much frequented foot-path over the ditches, that Gladys and Luke were proceeding.

To anyone as well acquainted as Clavering was with the general outline of the country the route that the lovers — or whatever their curious relation justifies us in calling them — must needs take, to return to Nevilton, was now as clearly marked as if it were indicated on a map.

"Curse him!" muttered the priest, "I hope he's not going to drown her in those brooks!"

He let his gaze wander across the level expanse at his feet. How could he get close to them, he wondered, so as to catch even a stray sentence or two of what they were saying.

His passion had reached such a point of insanity that he longed to be transformed into one of those dark-winged rooks that now in a thin melancholy line were flying over their heads, so that he might swoop down above them and follow them — follow them — every step of the way! He was like a man drawn to the edge of a precipice and magnetized by the very danger of the abyss. To be near them, to listen to what they said, — the craving for that possessed him with a fixed and obstinate hunger!

Suddenly he shook his cane in the air and almost leaped for joy. He remembered the existence, at the spot where the lane they were seeking began, of a large dilapidated barn, used, by the yeoman-farmer to whom the Chase belonged, as a rough store-house for cattle-food. The spot was so attractive a resting-

place for persons tired with walking, that it seemed as though it would be a strange chance indeed if the two wanderers did not take advantage of it. The point was, could he forestall them and arrive there first?

He surveyed the landscape around him with an anxious eye. It seemed as though by following the ridge of the hill upon which he stood, and crossing every obstacle that intervened, he ought to be able to do so — and to do so without losing sight of the two companions, as they unsuspiciously threaded their way over the flats.

Having made his resolution, he lost no time in putting it into action. He clambered without difficulty into the meadow on his right, and breaking, in his excitement, into a run, he forced his way through three successive bramble-hedges, and as many dew-drenched turnip-fields, without the least regard to the effect of this procedure upon his Sunday attire.

Every now and then, as the contours of the ground served, he caught a glimpse of the figures in the valley below, and the sight hastened the impetuosity of his speed. Once he felt sure he observed them pause and exchange an embrace, but this may have been an illusive mirage created by the mad fumes of the tempestuous jealousy which kept mounting higher and higher into his head. Recklessly and blindly he rushed on, performing feats of agility and endurance, such as in normal hours would have been utterly impossible.

From the moment he decided upon this desperate undertaking, to the moment, when, hot, breathless,

and dishevelled, he reached his destination, only a brief quarter of an hour had elapsed.

He entered the barn leaving the door wide-open behind him. In its interior tightly packed bundles of dark-coloured hay rose up almost to the roof. The floor was littered with straw and newly-cut clover.

On one side of the barn, beneath the piled-up hay, was a large shelving heap of threshed oats. Here, obviously, was the sort of place, if the lovers paused at this spot at all, where they would be tempted to recline.

Directly opposite these oats, in the portion of the shed that was most in shadow, Clavering observed a narrow slit between the hay-bundles. He approached this aperture and tried to wedge himself into it. The protruding stalks of the hay pricked his hands and face, and the dust choked him.

With angry coughs and splutters, and with sundry savage expletives by no means suitable to a priest of the church, he at length succeeded in firmly imbedding himself in this impenetrable retreat. He worked himself so far into the shadow, that not the most cautious eye could have discerned his presence. His sole danger lay in the fact that the dust might very easily give him an irresistible fit of sneezing. With the cessation of his violent struggles, however, this danger seemed to diminish; for the dust subsided as quickly as it had been raised, and otherwise, as he leant luxuriously back upon his warm-scented support, his position was by no means uncomfortable.

Meanwhile Luke and Gladys were slowly and deliberately crossing the darkening water-meadows.

Gladys, whose geographical knowledge of the district was limited to the immediate vicinity of her

home had not the remotest guess as to where she was being led. For all she knew Luke might have gone crazy, like his brother, and be now intending to plunge both himself and her into the depths of some lonely pool or weir. Nevertheless, she continued passively and meekly following him, walking, when the path along the dyke's edge narrowed, at some few paces behind him, with that peculiar air of being a led animal, which one often observes in the partners of tramps, as they plod the roads in the wake of their masters.

The expanse they traversed in this manner was possessed of a peculiar character of its own, a character which that especial hour of twilight seemed to draw forth and emphasize. It differed from similar tracts of marsh-land, such as may be found by the sea's edge, in being devoid of any romantic horizon to afford a spiritual escape from the gloom it diffused.

It was melancholy. It was repellant. It was sinister. It lacked the element of poetic expansiveness. It gave the impression of holding grimly to some dark obscene secret, which no visitation of sun or moon would ever cajole it into divulging.

It depressed without overwhelming. It saddened without inspiring. With its reeds, its mud, its willows, its livid phosphorescent ditches, it produced uneasiness rather than awe, and disquietude rather than solemnity.

Bounded by rolling hills on all sides save one, it gave the persons who moved across it the sensation of being enclosed in some vast natural arena.

Gladys wished she had brought her cloak with her, as the filmy white mists rose like ghosts out of

the stagnant ditches, and with clammy persistence invaded her unprotected form.

It was one of those places that seem to suggest the transaction of no stirring or heroic deeds, but of gloomy, wretched, chance-driven occurrences. A betrayed army might have surrendered there.

Luke seemed to give himself up with grim reciprocity to the influences of the spot. He appeared totally oblivious of his meek companion, and except to offer her languid, absent-minded assistance across various gates and dams, he remained as completely wrapped in reserve as were the taciturn levels over which they passed.

It was with an incredible sense of relief that Gladys found herself in the drier, more wholesome, atmosphere of Hullaway Chase. Here, as they walked briskly side by side over the thyme-scented turf, it seemed that the accumulated heat of the day, which, from the damp marsh-land only drew forth miasmic vapours, flung into the fragrant air delicious waftings of warm earth-breath. With still greater relief, and even with a little cry of joy, she caught sight of the friendly open door of the capacious barn, and the shadowy inviting heap of loose-flung oats lying beneath its wall of hay.

"Oh, we must go in here!" she cried, "what an adorable place!"

They entered, and the girl threw upon Luke one of her slow, long, amorous glances. "Kiss me!" she said, holding up her mouth to him beseechingly.

The faint light of the dying day fell with a pale glimmer upon her soft throat and rounded chin. Luke found himself disinclined to resist her.

There were tears on the girl's cheek when, loosening her hold upon his neck, she sank down on the idyllic couch offered them, and closed her eyes in childish contentment.

Luke hung over her thoughtfully and sadly. There is always something sad, — something that seems to bring with it a withering breath from the ultimate futility of the universe, — about a lover's recognition that the form which formerly thrilled him with ecstasy, now leaves him cold and unmoved. Such sadness, chilly and desolate as the hand of death itself, crept over the stone-carver's heart, as he looked at the gently-stirring breast and softly-parted lips of his beautiful mistress. He bent down and kissed her forehead, caressing her passively yielded fingers.

She opened her eyes and smiled at him, the lingering smile of a soothed and happy infant.

They remained thus, silent and at rest, for several moments. It was not long, however, before the subtle instinct of an enamoured woman made the girl aware that her friend's responsiveness had been but a momentary impulse. She started up, her eyes wide-open and her lips trembling.

"Luke!" she murmured, "Luke, darling, —" Her voice broke, in a curious little sob.

Luke gazed at her blankly, thankful that the weight of weary foreknowledge upon his face was concealed from her by the growing darkness.

"I want to say to you, my dear love," the girl went on, her bosom rising and falling in pitiful embarrassment, and her white fingers nervously scooping up handful after handful of the shadowy grain.

"I want to say to you something that is — that is very serious — for us both, Luke, — I want to tell you, ——"

Her voice once more died away, in the same inarticulate and curious gurgle, like the sob of water running under a weir.

Luke rose to his feet and stood in front of her. "It's all right," he said calmly. "You needn't agitate yourself. I understand."

The girl covered her face with her hands. "But what shall I do? What shall I do?" she sobbed. "I can't marry Ralph like this. He'll kill me when he finds out. I'm so afraid of him, Luke — you don't know, — you don't know, —"

"He'll forgive you," answered the stone-carver quietly. "He's not a person to burst out like that. Lots of people have to confess these little things after they're married. Some men aren't half so particular as you girls think."

Gladys raised her head and gave her friend a long queer look, the full import of which was concealed from him in the darkness. She made a futile little groping movement with her hand.

"Luke," she whispered, "I must just say this to you even if it makes you angry. I shouldn't be happy afterwards — whatever happens — if I didn't say it. I want you to know that I'm ready, if you wish, if — if you love me enough for that, Luke, — to go away with you anywhere! I feel it isn't as it used to be. I feel everything's different. But I want you to know, — to know without any mistake — that I'd go at once — willingly — wherever you took me!

"It's not that I'm begging you to marry me,"

she wailed, "it's only that I love you, love you and want you so frightfully, my darling!

"I wouldn't worry you, Luke," she added, in a low, pitiful little voice, that seemed to emerge rather from the general shadowiness of the place than from a human being's lips, "I wouldn't tease you, or scold you when you enjoyed yourself! It's only that I want to be with you, that I want to be near you. I never thought it would come to this. I thought —" Her voice died away again into the darkness.

Luke began pacing up and down the floor of the barn.

Once more she spoke. "I'd be faithful to you, Luke, married or unmmarried, — and I'd work, though I know you won't believe that. But I *can* do quite hard work, when I like!"

By some malignity of chance, or perhaps by a natural reaction from her pleading words, Luke's mind reverted to her tone and temper on that June morning when she insulted him by a present of money.

"No, Gladys," he said. "It won't do. You and I weren't made for each other. There are certain things — many things — in me that you'll never understand, and I daresay there are things in you that I never shall. We're not made for one another, child, I tell you. We shouldn't be happy for a week. I know myself, and I know you, and I'm sure it wouldn't do.

"Don't you fret yourself about Dangelis. If he finds out, he finds out — and that's the end of it. But I swear to you that I know *him* well enough to know that you've nothing to be afraid of — even if he does find out. He's not the kind of man to make

a fuss. I can see exactly the way he'd take it. He'd be sorry for you and laugh at himself, and plunge desperately into his painting.

"I like Dangelis, I tell you frankly. I think he's a thoroughly generous and large-minded fellow. Of course I've hardly seen him to speak to, but you can't be mistaken about a man like that. At least I can't! I seem to know him in and out, up hill and down dale.

"Make a fuss? Not he! He'll make this country ring and ting with the fame of his pictures. That's what he'll do! And as for being horrid to you — not he! I know him better than that. He'll be too much in love with you, too, — you little demon! That's another point to bear in mind.

"Oh, you'll have the whip-hand of him, never fear,— and our son, — I hope it *is* a son my dear! — will be treated as if it were his own.

"I know him, I tell you! He's a thoroughly decent fellow, though a bit of a fool, no doubt. But we're all that!

"Don't you be a little goose, Gladys, and get fussed up and worried over nothing. After all, what does it matter? Life's such a mad affair anyway! All we can do is to map things to the best of our ability, and then chance it.

"We're all on the verge of a precipice. Do you think I don't realize that? But that's no reason why we should rush blindly up to the thing, and throw ourselves over. And it would be nothing else than that, nothing else than sheer madness, for you and I to go off together.

"Do you think your father would give us a penny?

Not he! I detect in your father, Gladys, an extraordinary vein of obstinacy. You haven't clashed up against it yet, but try and play any of these games on him, and you'll see!

"No; one thing you may be perfectly sure of, and that is, that whatever he finds out, Dangelis will never breathe a word to your father. He's madly in love with you, girl, I tell you; and if I'm out of the way, you'll be able to do just what you like with him!"

It was completely dark now, and when Luke's oration came to an end there was no sound in the barn except a low sobbing.

"Come on, child; we must be getting home, or you'll be frightfully late. Here! give me your hand. Where are you?"

He groped about in the darkness until his sleeve brushed against her shoulder. It was trembling under her efforts to suppress her sobs.

He got hold of her wrists and pulled her to her feet. "Come on, my dear," he repeated, "we must get out of this now. Give me one nice kiss before we go."

She permitted herself to be caressed — passive and unresisting in his arms.

In the darkness they touched the outer edge of Mr. Clavering's hiding-place, and the girl, swaying a little backwards under Luke's endearments, felt the pressure of the hay-wall behind her. She did not, however, feel the impassioned touch of the choking kiss which the poor imprisoned priest desperately imprinted on a loose tress of her hair.

It was one of those pitiful and grotesque situa-

tions which seem sometimes to arise, — as our fantastic planet turns on its orbit, — for no other purpose than that of gratifying some malign vein of goblin-like irony in the system of things.

That at the moment when Luke, under the spell of the shadowy fragrance of the place, and the pliant submissiveness of the girl's form, threw something of his old ardour into his kiss, her other, more desperate love should have dared such an approach, was a coincidence apparently of the very kind to appeal to the perverse taste of this planetary humour.

The actual result of such a strange consentaneousness of rival emotion was that the three human heads remained for a brief dramatic moment in close juxtaposition, — the two fair ones and the dark one so near one another, that it might have seemed almost inevitable that their thoughts should interact in that fatal proximity.

The pitiful pathos of the whole human comedy might well have been brought home to any curious observer able to pierce that twilight! Such an observer would have felt towards those three poor obsessed craniums the same sort of tenderness that they themselves would have been conscious of, had they suddenly come across a sleeping person or a dead body.

Strange, that the ultimate pity in these things, — in this blind antagonistic striving of human desires under such gracious flesh and blood — should only arouse these tolerant emotions when they are no longer of any avail! Had some impossible bolt from heaven stricken these three impassioned ones in their tragic approximation, how, — long afterwards, — the dis-

coverer of the three skeletons would have moralized upon their fate! As it was, there was nothing but the irony of the gods to read what the irony of the gods was writing upon that moment's drowning sands.

When Luke and Gladys left the barn, and hurriedly, under the rising moon, retook their way towards Nevilton, Clavering emerged from his concealment dazed and stupefied. He threw himself down in the darkness on the heap of oats and strove to give form and coherence to the wild flood of thoughts which swept through him.

So this was what he had come out to learn! This was the knowledge that his mad jealousy had driven him to snatch!

He thought of the exquisite sacredness — for him — of that morning's ritual in the church, and of how easily he had persuaded himself to read into the girl's preoccupied look something more than natural sadness over Andersen's death. He had indeed, — only those short hours ago, — allowed himself the sweet illusion that this religious initiation really meant, for his pagan love, some kind of Vita Nuova.

The fates had rattled their dice, however, to a different tune. The unfortunate girl was indeed entering upon a Vita Nuova, but how hideously different a one from that which had been his hope!

On Wednesday came the confirmation service. How could he, — with any respect for his conscience as a guardian of these sacred rites, — permit Gladys to be confirmed now? Yet what ought he to do? Drops of cold sweat stood upon his forehead as he

wondered whether it was incumbent upon him to take the first train the following morning for the bishop's palace and to demand an interview.

No. Tomorrow the prelate would be starting on his episcopal tour. Clavering would have to pursue him from one remote country village to another, and what a pursuit that would be! He recoiled from the idea with sick aversion.

Could he then suppress his fatal knowledge and let the event take place without protest? To act in such a manner would be nothing less than to play the part of an accomplice in the girl's sin.

Perhaps when the bishop actually appeared he would be able to secure a confidential interview with him and lay the whole matter before him. Or should he act on his own responsibility, and write to Gladys himself, telling her that under the circumstances it would be best for her to stay away from the ceremony?

What reason could he give for such an extraordinary mandate? Could he bluntly indicate to her, in black and white, the secret he had discovered, and the manner of its discovery? To accuse her on the ground of mere village gossip would be to lay himself open to shameful humiliation. Was he, in any case, justified in putting the fatal information, gathered in this way, to so drastic a use? It was only in his madness as a jealous lover that he had possessed himself of this knowledge. As priest of Nevilton he knew nothing.

He had no right to know anything. No; he must pay the penalty of his shameful insanity by bearing this burden in silence, even though his conscience

groaned and cracked beneath the weight. Such a silence, with its attendant misery of self-accusation and shame, was all he could offer to his treacherous enchantress as a tacit recompense for having stolen her secret.

He rose and left the granary. As he walked homeward, along the Nevilton road, avoiding by a sort of scrupulous reaction the shorter route followed by the others, it seemed to him as though the night had never been more sultry, or the way more loaded with the presence of impendent calamity.

CHAPTER XXV

METAMORPHOSIS

THE day of James Andersen's funeral and of Gladys' confirmation happened to coincide with a remarkable and unexpected event in the life of Mr. Quincunx. Whatever powers, lurking in air or earth, were attempting at that moment to influence the fatal stream of events in Nevilton, must have been grimly conscious of something preordained and inevitable about this eccentric man's drift towards appalling moral disaster.

It seemed as though nothing on earth now could stop the marriage of Lacrima and Goring, and from the point of view of the moralist, or even of the person of normal decency, such a marriage, if it really did lead to Mr. Quincunx's pensioning at the hands of his enemy, necessarily held over him a shame and a disgrace proportionate to the outrage done to the girl who loved him. What these evil powers played upon, if evil powers they were, — and not the blind laws of cause and effect, — was the essential character of Mr. Quincunx, which nothing in heaven nor earth seemed able to change.

There are often, however, elements in our fate, which lie, it might seem, deeper than any calculable prediction, deeper, it may be, than the influence of the most powerful supernatural agents, and these elements — unstirred by angel or devil — are some-

times roused to activity by the least expected cause. It is, at these moments, as though Fate, in the incalculable comprehensiveness of her immense designs, condescended to make use of Chance, her elfish sister, to carry out what the natural and normal stream of things would seem to have decreed as an impossibility.

Probably not a living soul who knew him, — certainly not Lacrima, — had the least expectation of any chance of change in Mr. Quincunx. But then none of these persons had really sounded the depths in the soul of the man. There were certain mysterious and unfathomable gulfs in the sea-floor of Mr. Quincunx's being which would have exhausted all the sorceries of Witch-Bessie even to locate.

So fantastic and surprising are the ways of destiny, that, — as shall be presently seen, — what neither gods nor devils, nor men nor angels, could effect, was effected by nothing more nor less than a travelling circus.

The day of the burying of James and the confirmation of Gladys brought into Nevilton a curious cortège of popular entertainers. This cortège consisted of one of those small wandering circuses, which, during the month of August are wont to leave the towns and move leisurely among the remoter country villages, staying nowhere more than a night, and taking advantage of any local festival or club-meeting to enhance their popularity.

The circus in question, — flamingly entitled Porter's Universal World-Show, — was owned and conducted by a certain Job Love, a shrewd and avaricious ruffian, who boasted, though with little justi-

fication, the inheritance of gipsy blood. As a matter of fact, the authentic gipsy tribes gave Mr. Love an extremely wide berth, avoiding his path as they would have avoided the path of the police. This cautious attitude was not confined, however, to gipsies. Every species of itinerant hawker and pedler avoided the path of Mr. Love, and the few toy-booths and sweet-stalls that followed his noisy roundabouts were a department of his own providing.

It was late on Tuesday night when the World-Show established itself in Nevilton Square. The sound of hammers and the barking of dogs was the last thing that the villagers heard before they slept, and the first thing they heard when they awoke.

The master of the World-Show spent the night according to his custom in solitary regal grandeur in the largest of his caravans. The sun had not, however, pierced the white mists in the Nevilton orchards before Mr. Love was up and abroad. The first thing he did, on descending the steps of his caravan, was to wash his hands and face in the basin of the stone fountain. His next proceeding was to measure out into a little metal cup which he produced from his pocket a small quantity of brandy and to pour this refreshment, diluted with water from the fountain, down his capacious throat.

Mr. Love was a lean man, of furtive and irascible appearance. His countenance, bleached by exposure into a species of motley-coloured leather, shone after its immersion in the fountain like the knob of a well-worn cudgel. His whitish hair, cut in convict style close to his head, emphasized the polished mahogany of his visage, from the upper portion of which his

sky-blue eyes, small and glittering, shone out defiantly upon the world, like ominous jewels set in the forehead of an obscene and smoke-darkened idol.

Having replaced his cup and flask in his pocket, the master of the World-Show looked anxiously at the omens of the weather, snuffing the morning breeze with the air of one not lightly to be fooled either by rain or shine. Returning to the still silent circus, he knocked sharply with his knuckles at the door of the smallest of the three caravans.

"Flick!" he shouted, "let me in! Flick! Old Flick! Darn 'ee, man, for a blighting sand-louse! Open the door, God curse you! Old Flick! Old Flick! Old Flick!"

Thus assaulted, the door of the caravan was opened from within, and Mr. Love pushed his way into the interior. A strange enough sight met him when once inside.

The individual apostrophized as "Old Flick" closed and bolted the door with extraordinary precaution, as soon as his master had entered, and then turned and hovered nervously before him, while Mr. Love sank down on the only chair in the place. The caravan was bare of all furniture except a rough cooking-stove and a three-legged deal table. But it was at neither of these objects that Job Love stared, as he tilted back his chair and waved impatiently aside the deprecatory old man.

Stretched on a ragged horse-blanket upon the floor lay a sleeping child. Clothed in little else than a linen bodice and a short flannel petticoat, she turned restlessly in her slumber under Mr. Love's scrutiny, and crossing one bare leg over the other, flung out

a long white arm, while her dark curls, disturbed by her movement, fell over her face and hid it from view.

"Ah!" remarked Mr. Love. "Quieter now, I see. She must dance today, Flick, and no mistake about it! You must take her out in the fields this morning, like you did that other one. I can't have no more rampaging and such-like, in my decent circus. But she must dance, there's no getting over that, — she must dance, Old Flick! 'Twas your own blighting notion to take her on, remember; and I can't have no do-nothing foreigners hanging around, specially now August be come.

"What did she say her nonsense-name was? Lores, — Dolores? Whoever heard tell of such a name as that?"

The sound of his voice seemed to reach the child even in her sleep; for flinging her arms over her head, and turning on her back, she uttered a low indistinguishable murmur. Her eyes, however, remained closed, the dark curves of her long eye-lashes contrasting with the scarlet of her mouth and the ivory pallor of her skin.

Even Job Love — though not precisely an æsthete — was struck by the girl's beauty.

"She'll make a fine dancer, Flick, a fine dancer! How old dost think she be? 'Bout twelve, or may-be more, I reckon.

"'Tis pity she won't speak no Christian word. 'Tis wonderful, how these foreign childer do hold so obstinate by their darned fancy-tongue!

"We must trim her out in them spangle-gauzes of Skipsy Jane. *She* were the sort of girl to make the

boys holler. But this one'll do well enough, I reckon, if so be she goes smilin' and chaffin' upon the boards.

"But no more of that devil's foolery, Flick? Dost hear, man? Take her out into the fields; — take her out into the fields! She must dance and she must smile, all in Skipsy Jane's spangles, come noon this day. She must do so, Flick — or I ain't Jobie Love!"

The old man paused in his vague moth-like hovering, and surveyed the outstretched figure. His own appearance was curious enough to excite a thrill of intense curiosity, had any less callous eye but that of his master been cast upon him.

He produced the effect not so much of a living person, animated by natural impulses, as of a dead body possessed by some sort of wandering spirit which made use of him for its own purposes.

If by chance this spirit were to desert him, one felt that what would be left of Old Flick would be nothing but the mask of a man,— a husk, a shard, a withered stalk, a wisp of dried-up grass! The old creature was as thin as a lathe; and his cavernous, colourless eyes and drooping jaw looked, in that indistinct light, as vague and shadowy as though they belonged to some phantasmal mirage of mist and rain drifted in from the sleeping fields.

"How did 'ee ever get Mother Sterner to let 'ee have so dainty a bit of goods?" went on Mr. Love, continuing his survey of their unconscious captive. "The old woman must have been blind-scared of the police or summat, so as to want to be free of the maid. 'Tisn't every day you can pick up a lass so cut out for the boards as she be."

At intervals during his master's discourse the

parchment-like visage of the old man twisted and contorted itself, as if with the difficulty of finding words.

When Job Love at last became silent, the words issued from him as if they had been rustling eddies of chaff, blown through dried stalks.

"I've tried her with one thing, Mister, and I've tried her with another, — but 'tis no use; she do cry and cry, and there's no handling her. I guess I must take her into them fields, as you do say. 'Tis because of folks hearing that she do carry on so."

Job Love frowned and scratched his forehead.

"Damn her," he cried, "for a limpsy cat! Well — Old Flick — ye picked her up and ye must start her off. This show don't begin till nigh along noon, — so if ye thinks ye can bring her to reason, some ways or 'tother ways, off with 'ee, my man! Get her a bite of breakfast first, — and good luck to 'ee! Only don't let's have no fuss, and don't let's have no onlookers. I'm not the man to stand for any law-breaking. This show's a decent show, and Job Love's a decent man. If the wench makes trouble, ye must take her back where she did come from. Mother Sterner'll have to slide down. I can't have no quarrels with King and Country, over a limpsy maid like she!"

Uttering these words in a tone of formidable finality, Mr. Love moved to the entrance and let himself out.

Their master gone, Old Flick turned waveringly to the figure on the floor. Taking down a faded coat from its peg on the wall, he carefully spread it over the child, tucking it round her body with shaking

hands. He then went to the stove in the corner, lit it, and arranged the kettle. From the stove he turned to the three-legged table; and removing from a hanging cupboard a tea-pot, some cups and plates, a loaf of bread and a pat of butter, he set out these objects with meticulous nicety, avoiding the least clatter or sound. This done, he sat down upon the solitary chair, and waited the boiling of the water with inscrutable passivity.

From outside the caravan came the shuffle of stirring feet and the murmur of subdued and drowsy voices. The camp was beginning to enter upon its labour of preparation.

When he had made tea, Old Flick touched his sleeping captive lightly on the shoulder.

The girl started violently, and sat up, with wide-open eyes. She began talking hurriedly, protesting and imploring; but not a word of her speech was intelligible to Old Flick, for the simple reason that it was Italian, — Italian of the Neapolitan inflexion.

The old man handed her a strong cup of tea, together with a large slice of bread-and-butter, uttering as he did so all manner of soothing and reassuring words. When she had finished her breakfast he brought her water and soap.

"Tidy thee-self up, my pretty," he said. "We be goin' out, along into them fields, present."

Bolting the caravan door on the outside, he shuffled off to the fountain to perform his own ablutions, and to assist his companions in unloading the stage-properties, and setting up the booths and swings. After the lapse of an hour he climbed the caravan-steps and re-entered softly.

He found the girl crouched in a corner, her hands clasped over her knees, and traces of tears upon her cheeks. Before leaving her, the old man had placed shoes and stockings by her side, and these she now wore, together with a dark-coloured skirt and a scarlet gipsy-shawl.

"Come," he said. "Thee be goin' wi' I into the fields. Thee be goin' to learn a dancin' trick or two. Show opens along of noon; and Master, he's goin' to let 'ee have Skipsy Jane's spangles."

How much of this the child understood it is impossible to say; but the old man's tone was not threatening, and the idea of being taken away — somewhere — anywhere — roused vague hopes in her soul. She pulled the red shawl over her head and let him lead her by the hand.

Down the steps they clambered, and hurriedly threaded their way across the square.

The old man took the road towards Yeoborough, and turned with the girl up Dead Man's Lane. He was but dimly acquainted with the neighbourhood; but once before, in his wanderings as a pedler, he had encamped in a certain grassy hollow bordering on the Auber Woods, and the memory of the seclusion of this spot drew him now.

As they passed Mr. Quincunx's garden they encountered the solitary himself, who, in his sympathy with Luke Andersen on this particular day, had resolved to pay the young man an early morning visit.

The recluse looked with extreme and startled interest at this singular pair. The child's beauty struck him with a shock that almost took his breath

away. There was something about the haunting expression of her gaze as she turned it upon him that roused an overpowering flood of tenderness and pity in untouched abysses of his being.

There must have been some instantaneous reciprocity in the eccentric man's grey eyes, for the young girl turned back after they had passed, and throwing the shawl away from her head, fixed upon him what seemed a deliberate and beseeching look of appeal.

Mr. Quincunx was so completely carried out of his normal self by this imploring look that he went so far as to answer its inarticulate prayer by a wave of his hand, and by a sign that indicated, — whether she understood it or not, — that he intended to render her assistance.

In his relations with Lacrima Mr. Quincunx was always remotely conscious that the girl's character was stronger than his own, and — Pariah-like — this had the effect of lessening the emotion he felt towards her.

But now — in the look of the little Dolores — there was an appeal from a weakness and helplessness much more desperate than his own, — an appeal to him from the deepest gulfs of human dependence. The glance she had given him burned in his brain like a coal of white fire. It seemed to cry out to him from all the flotsam and jetsam, all the drift and wreckage of everything that had ever been drowned, submerged, and stranded, by the pitilessness of Life, since the foundation of the world.

The child's look had indeed the same effect upon Mr. Quincunx that the look of his Master had upon

the fear-stricken Apostle, in the hall of Caiaphas the high priest. In one heart-piercing stab it brought to his overpowered consciousness a vision of all the victims of cruelty who had ever cried aloud for help since the generations of men began their tragic journey.

Perhaps to all extremely sensitive natures of Mr. Quincunx's type, a type of morbidly self-conscious weakness as well as sensitiveness, the electric stir produced by beauty and sex can only reach a culmination when the medium of its appearance approximates to the extreme limit of fragility and helplessness.

Hell itself, so to speak, had to display to him its span-long babes, before he could be aroused to descend and "harrow" it! But once roused in him, this latent spirit of the pitiful Son of Man became formidable, reckless, irresistible. The very absence in him of the usual weight of human solidity and "character" made him the more porous to this divine mood.

Anyone who watched him returning hastily to his cottage from the garden-gate would have been amazed by the change in his countenance. He looked and moved like a man under a blinding illumination. So must the citizen of Tarsus have looked, when he staggered into the streets of Damascus.

He literally ran into his kitchen, snatched up his hat and stick, poured a glass of milk down his throat, put a couple of biscuits into his pocket, and re-issued, ready for his strange pursuit. He hurried up the lane to the first gate that offered itself, and passing into the field continued the chase on the further side of the hedge.

The old man evidently found the hill something of an effort, for it was not long before Mr. Quincunx overtook them.

He passed them by unremarked, and continued his advance along the hedgerow till he reached the summit of the ridge between Wild Pine and Seven Ashes. Here, concealed behind a clump of larches, he awaited their approach. To his surprise, they entered one of the fields on the opposite side of the road, and began walking across it.

Mr. Quincunx watched them. In a corner of the field they were crossing lay a spacious hollow, — once the bed of a pond, — but now quite dry and overgrown with moss and clover.

Old Flick's instinct led him to this spot, as one well adapted to the purpose he had in mind, both by reason of its absolute seclusion and by reason of its smooth turf-floor.

Mr. Quincunx waited till their two figures vanished into this declivity, and then he himself crossed the field in their track.

Having reached the mossy level of the vanished pond,—a place which seemed as though Nature herself had designed it with a view to his present intention,—Old Flick assumed a less friendly air towards his captive. A psychologist interested in searching out the obscure workings of derelict and submerged souls, would have come to the speedy conclusion as he watched the old man's cadaverous face that the spirit which at present animated his corpse-like body was one that had little commiseration or compunction in it.

The young Dolores had not, it seemed, to deal at

this moment with an ordinary human scoundrel, but with a faded image of humanity galvanized into life by some conscienceless Larva.

In proportion as this unearthly obsession grew upon Old Flick, his natural countenance grew more and more dilapidated and withered. Innumerable years seemed suddenly added to the burden he already carried. The lines of his face assumed a hideous and Egyptian immobility; only his eyes, as he turned them upon his companion, were no longer colourless.

"Doll," said he, "now thee must try thee's steps, or 'twill be the worse for thee!"

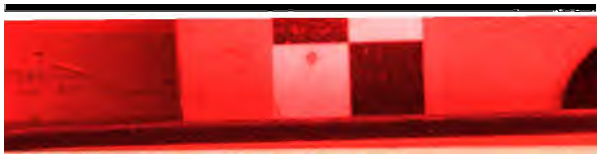
The girl only answered by flinging herself down on her knees before him, and pouring forth unintelligible supplications.

"No more o' this," cried the old man; "no more o' this! I've got to learn 'ee to dance, — and learn 'ee to dance I will. Ye'll have to go on them boards come noon, whether 'ee will or no!"

The child only clasped her hands more tightly together, and renewed her pleading.

It would have needed the genius of some supreme painter, and of such a painter in an hour of sheer insanity, to have done justice to the extraordinary expression that crossed the countenance of Old Flick at that moment. The outlines of his face seemed to waver and decompose. None but an artist who had, like the insatiable Leonardo, followed the very dead into their forlorn dissolution, could have indicated the setting of his eyes; and his eyes themselves, madness alone could have depicted.

With a sudden vicious jerk the old man snatched the shawl from the girl's shoulders, flung it on the



ground, and seizing her by the wrists pulled her up upon her feet.

"Dance, ye baggage!" he cried hoarsely;—"dance, I tell 'ee!"

It was plain that the luckless waif understood clearly enough now what was required of her, and it was also plain that she recognized that the moment for supplication had gone by. She stepped back a pace or two upon the smooth turf, and slipping off her unlaced shoes, — shoes far too large for her small feet, — she passed the back of her hand quickly across her eyes, shook her hair away from her forehead, and began a slow, pathetic little dance.

"Higher!" cried Old Flick in an excited voice, beating the air with his hand and humming a strange snatch of a tune that might have inspired the dances of Polynesian cannibals. "Higher, I tell 'ee."

The girl felt compelled to obey; and putting one hand on her hip and lifting up her skirt with the other, she proceeded, shyly and in forlorn silence, to dance an old Neapolitan folk-dance, such as might be witnessed, on any summer evening, by the shores of Amalfi or Sorrento.

It was at this moment that Mr. Quincunx made his appearance against the sky-line above them. He looked for one brief second at the girl's bare arms, waving curls, and light-swinging body, and then leapt down between them.

All nervousness, all timidity, seemed to have fallen away from him like a snake's winter-skin under the spring sun. He seized the child's hand with an air of indescribable gentleness and authority, and made so menacing and threatening a gesture that Old

Flick, staggering backwards, nearly fell to the ground.

"Whose child is this?" he demanded sternly, soothing the frightened little dancer with one hand, while with the other he shook his cane in the direction of the gasping and protesting old man.

"Whose child is this? You've stolen her, you old rascal! You're no Italian, — anyone can see that! You're a damned old tramp, and if you weren't so old and ugly I'd beat you to death; do you hear? — to death, you villain! Whose child is she? Can't you speak? Take care; I'm badly tempted to make you taste this, — to make *you* skip and dance a little!

"What do you say? Job Love's circus? Well, — he's not an Italian either, is he? So if you haven't stolen her, he has."

He turned to the child, stooping over her with infinite tenderness, and folding the shawl of which she had again possessed herself, with hands as gentle as a mother's, about her shoulders and head.

"Where are your parents, my darling?" he asked, adding with a flash of amazing presence of mind, — "your 'padre' and 'madre'?"

The girl seemed to get the drift of the question, and with a pitiful little smile pointed earth-ward, and made a sweeping gesture with both her hands, as if to indicate the passing of death's wings.

"Dead? — both dead, eh?" muttered Mr. Quincunx. "And these rascals who've got hold of you are villains and rogues? Damned rogues! Damned villains!"

He paused and muttered to himself. "What the devil's the Italian for a god-forsaken rascal? —

'Cattivo!' 'Tutto cattivo!' — the whole lot of them a set of confounded scamps!"

The child nodded her head vigorously.

"You see," he cried, turning to Old Flick, "she disowns you all. This is clearly a most knavish piece of work! What were you doing to the child? eh? eh? eh?" Mr. Quincunx accompanied these final syllables with renewed flourishes of his stick in the air.

Old Flick retreated still further away, his legs shaking under him. "Here, — you can clear out of this! Do you understand? You can clear out of this; and go back to your damned master, and tell him I'm going to send the police after him!

"As for this girl, I'm going to take her home with me. So off you go, — you old reprobate; and thankful you may be that I haven't broken every bone in your body! I've a great mind to do it now. Upon my soul I've a great mind to do it!

"Shall I beat him into a jelly for you, — my darling? Shall I make him skip and dance for you?"

The child seemed to understand his gestures, if not his words; for she clung passionately to his hands, and pressing them to her lips, covered them with kisses; shaking her head at the same time, as much as to say, "Old Flick is nothing. Let Old Flick go to the devil, as long as I can stay with you!" In some such manner as this, at any rate, Mr. Quincunx interpreted her words.

"Sheer off, then, you old scoundrel! Shog off back to your confounded circus! And when you've got there, tell your friends, — Job Love and his gang, — that if they want this little one they'd better come and fetch her!

"Dead Man's Lane, — that's where I live. It's easily enough found; and so is the police-station in Yeoborough, — as you and your damned kidnappers shall discover before you've done with me!"

Uttering these words in a voice so menacing that the old man shook like an aspen-leaf, Mr. Quincunx took the girl by the hand, and, ascending the grassy slope, walked off with her across the field.

Old Flick seemed reduced to a condition bordering upon imbecility. He staggered up out of that unpropitious hollow, and stood stock-still, like one petrified, until they were out of sight. Then, very slowly and mumbling incoherently to himself, he made his way back towards the village.

He did not even turn his head as he passed Mr. Quincunx's cottage. Indeed, it is extremely doubtful how far he had recognized him as the person they encountered on their way, and still more doubtful how far he had heard or understood, when the tenant of Dead Man's Lane indicated the place of his abode.

The sudden transformation of the timid recluse into a formidable man of action did not end with his triumphant retirement to his familiar domain. Some mysterious fibre in his complicated temperament had been struck, and continued to be struck, by the little Dolores, which not only rendered him indifferent to personal danger, but willing and happy to encounter it.

The event only added one more proof to the sage dictum of the Chinese philosopher, — that you can never tell of what a man is capable until he is stone-dead.

CHAPTER XXVI

VARIOUS ENCOUNTERS

DURING the hours when Mr. Quincunx was undergoing this strange experience, several other human brains under the roofs of Nevilton were feeling the pressure of extreme perturbation.

Gladys, after a gloomy breakfast, which was rendered more uncomfortable, not only by her father's chaffing references to the approaching ceremony, but by a letter from Dangelis, had escaped to her room to be assisted by Lacrima in dressing for the confirmation.

In his letter the artist declared his intention of spending that night at the Gloucester Hotel in Weymouth, and begged his betrothed to forgive this delay in his return to her side.

This communication caused Gladys many tremors of disquietude. Could it be possible that the American had found out something and that he had gone to Weymouth to meditate at leisure upon his course of action?

In any case this intimation of a delay in his return irritated the girl. It struck her in her tenderest spot. It was a direct flouting of her magnetic power. It was an insult to her sex-vanity.

She had seen nothing of Luke since their Sunday's excursion; and as Lacrima, with cold submissive fingers, helped her to arrange her white dress and

virginal veil, she could hear the sound of the bell tolling for James Andersen's funeral.

Mingled curiously enough with this melancholy vibration falling at protracted intervals upon the air, like the stroke of some reiterated hammer of doom, came another sound, a sound of a completely opposite character, — the preluding strains, namely, of the steam roundabouts of Porter's Universal Show.

It was as though on one side of the village the angel of death were striking an iron-threatening gong, while, on the other side, the demons of life were howling a brazen defiance.

The association of the two sounds as they reached her at this critical hour brought the figure of Luke vividly and obsessingly into her mind. How well she knew the sort of comment he would make upon the bizarre combination! Beneath the muslin frills of her virginal dress, — a dress that made her look fairer and younger than usual, — her heart ached with sick longing for her evasive lover.

The wheel had indeed come full circle for the fair-haired girl. She could not help the thought recurring again and again, as Lacrima's light fingers adjusted her veil, that the next time she dressed in this manner it would be for her wedding-day. Her one profound consolation lay in the knowledge that her cousin, even more deeply than herself, dreaded the approach of that fatal Thursday.

Her hatred for the pale-cheeked Italian re-accumulated every drop of its former venom, as with an air of affectionate gratitude she accepted her assistance.

It is a psychological peculiarity of certain human beings that the more they hate, the more they crave,

with a curious perverted instinct, some sort of physical contact with the object of their hatred.

Every touch of Lacrima's hand increased the intensity of Gladys' loathing; and yet, so powerful is the instinct to which I refer, she lost no opportunity of accentuating the contact between them, letting their fingers meet again and again, and even their breath, and throwing back her rounded chin to make it easier for those hated wrists to busy themselves about her throat. Her general air was an air of playful passivity; but at one moment, imprinting a kiss on the girl's arm as, in the process of arranging her veil, it brushed across her cheek, she seemed almost anxious to convey to Lacrima the full implication of her real feeling.

Never has a human caress been so electric with the vibrations of antipathy, as was that kiss. She followed up this signal of animosity by a series of feline taunts relative to John Goring, one of which, from its illuminated insight into the complex strata of the girl's soul, delighted her by its effect.

Lacrima winced under it, as if under the sting of a lash, and a burning flood of scarlet suffused her cheeks. She dropped her hands and stepped back, uttering a fierce vow that nothing — nothing on earth — would induce her to accompany a girl who could say such things, to such a ceremony!

"No, I wouldn't, — I wouldn't!" cried Gladys mockingly. "I wouldn't dream of coming with me! Tomorrow week, anyway, we're bound to go to church side by side. Father wanted to drive with me then, you know, and to let mother go with you, — but I wouldn't hear of it! I said they must go in one

carriage, and you and I in another, so that our last drive together we should be quite by ourselves. You'll like that, won't you, darling?"

Lacrima's only answer to this was to turn her back to her cousin, and begin putting on her hat and gloves.

"I know where you're going," said Gladys. "You're going to see your dear Maurice. Give him my love! I should be ashamed to let such a wretched coward come near me.

"James — poor boy! — was a fellow of a different metal. He'd some spirit in him. Listen! When that bell stops tolling they'll be carrying him into the church. I expect you're thinking now, darling, that it would have been better if you'd treated him differently. Of course you know it's you that killed him? Oh, nobody else! Just little Lacrima and her coy, demure ways!

"*I've* never killed a man. I can say that, at all events.

"That's right! Run off to her dear Maurice, — her dear brave Maurice! Perhaps he'll take her on his knees again, and she'll play the sweet little innocent, — like that day when I peeped through the window!"

This final dart had hardly reached its objective before Lacrima without attempting any retort rushed from the room.

"I *will* go and see Maurice. I will! I will!" she murmured to herself as she ran down the broad oak stair-case, and slipped out by the East door.

Simultaneously with these events, a scene of equal dramatic intensity, though of a very different charac-

ter, was being enacted in the vicarage drawing-room.

Vennie, as we have noted, had resolved to postpone for the present her reception into the Catholic Church. She had also resolved that nothing on earth should induce her to reveal to her mother her change of creed until the thing was an accomplished fact. The worst, however, of the kind of mental suppression in which she had been living of late, is that it tends to produce a volcanic excitement of the nerves, liable at any moment to ungovernable upheavals. Quite little things — mere straws and bagatelles — are enough to set this eruption beginning; and when once it begins, the accumulated passion of the long days of fermentation gives the explosion a horrible force.

One perpetual annoyance to Vennie was her mother's persistent fondness for family prayers. It seemed to the girl as though Valentia insisted on this performance, not so much out of a desire to serve God, as out of a sense of what was due to herself as the mistress of a well-conducted establishment.

Vennie always fancied she discerned a peculiar tone of self-satisfaction in her mother's voice, as, rather loudly, and extremely clearly, she read her liturgical selections to the assembled servants.

On this particular morning the girl had avoided the performance of this rite, by leaving her room earlier than usual and taking refuge in the furthest of the vicarage orchards. Backwards and forwards she walked, in that secluded place, with her hands behind her and her head bent, heedless of the drenching dew which covered every grass-blade and of the heavy white mists that still hung about the tree-trunks. She was obliged to return to her room and

change her shoes and stockings before joining her mother at breakfast, but not before she had prayed a desperate prayer, down there among the misty trees, for the eternal rest of James Andersen's soul.

This little incident of her absence from prayers was the direct cause of the unfortunate scene that followed.

Valentia hardly spoke to her daughter while the meal proceeded, and when at last it was over, she retired to the drawing-room and began writing letters.

This was an extremely ill-omened sign to anyone who knew Mrs. Seldom's habits. Under normal conditions, her first proceeding after breakfast was to move to the kitchen, where she engaged in a long culinary debate with both cook and gardener; a course of action which was extremely essential, as without it, — so bitter was the feud between these two worthies, — it is unlikely that there would have been any vegetables at all, either for lunch or dinner. When anything occurred to throw her into a mood of especially good spirits, she would pass straight out of the French window on to the front lawn, and armed with a pair of formidable garden-scissors would make a selection of flowers and leaves appropriate to a festival temper.

But this adjournment at so early an hour to the task of letter-writing indicated that Valentia was in a condition of mind, which in anyone but a lady of her distinction and breeding could have been called nothing less than a furious rage. For of all things in the world, Mrs. Seldom most detested this business of writing letters; and therefore, — with that perverse self-punishing instinct, which is one of the most artful weapons of offence given to refined gentle-

women, — she took grim satisfaction in setting herself down to write; thus producing chaos in the kitchen, where the gardener refused to obey the cook, and miserable remorse in the heart of Vennie, who wandered up and down the lawn meditating a penitential apology.

Satisfied in her heart that she was causing universal annoyance and embarrassment by her proceeding, and yet quite confident that there was nothing but what was proper and natural in her writing letters at nine o'clock in the morning, Valentia began, by gentle degrees, to recover her lost temper.

The only real sedative to thoroughly aggravated nerves, is the infliction of similar aggravation upon the nerves of others. This process is like the laying on of healing ointment; and the more extended the disturbance which we have the good fortune to create, the sooner we ourselves recover our equanimity.

Valentia had already cast several longing glances through the window at the heavy sunshine falling mistily on the asters and petunias, and in another moment she would probably have left her letter and joined her daughter in the garden, had not Vennie anticipated any such movement by entering the room herself.

"I ought to make you understand, mother," the girl began as soon as she stepped in, speaking in that curious strained voice which people assume when they have worked themselves up to a pitch of nervous excitement, "that when I don't appear at prayers, it isn't because I'm in a sulky temper, or in any mad haste to get out of doors. It's — it's for a different reason."

Valentia gazed at her in astonishment. The tone in which Vennie spoke was so tense, her eyes shone with such a strange brilliance, and her look was altogether so abnormal, that Mrs. Seldom completely forget her injured priestess-vanity, and waited in sheer maternal alarm for the completion of the girl's announcement.

"Its because I've made up my mind to become a Catholic, and Catholics aren't allowed to attend any other kind of service than their own."

Valentia rose to her feet and looked at her daughter in blank dismay. Her first feeling was one of overpowering indignation against Mr. Taxater, to whose treacherous influence she felt certain this madness was mainly due.

There was a terrible pause during which Vennie, leaning against the back of a chair, was conscious that both herself and her mother were trembling from head to foot. The soft murmur of wood-pigeons wafted in from the window, was now blended with two other sounds, the sound of the tolling of the church-bell and the sound of the music of Mr. Love's circus, testing the efficiency of its roundabouts.

"So this is what it has come to, is it?" said the old lady at last. "And I suppose the next thing you'll tell me, in this unkind, inconsiderate way, is that you've decided to become a nun!"

Vennie made a little movement with her head.

"You have?" cried Valentia, pale with anger. "You have made up your mind to do that? Well — I wouldn't have believed it of you, Vennie! In spite of everything I've done for you; in spite of everything

I've taught you; in spite of everything I've prayed for; — you can go and do this! Oh, you're an unkind, ungrateful girl! But I know that look on your face. I've known it from your childhood. When you look like that there's no hope of moving you. Go on, then! Do as you wish to do. Leave your mother in her old age, and destroy the last hope of our family. I won't speak another word. I know nothing I can say will change you." She sank down upon the chintz-covered sofa and covered her face with her hands.

Vennie cursed herself for her miserable want of tact. What demon was it that had tempted her to break her resolution? Then, suddenly, as she looked at her mother swaying to and fro on the couch, a strange impulse of hard inflexible obstinacy rose up in her.

These wretched human affections, — so unbalanced and selfish, — what a relief to escape from them altogether! Like the passing on its way, across a temperate ocean, of some polar iceberg, there drove, at that moment, through Vennie's consciousness, a wedge of frozen, adamantine contempt for all these human, too-human clingings and clutchings which would fain imprison the spirit and hold it down with soft-strangling hands.

In her deepest heart she turned almost savagely away from this grey-haired woman, sitting there so hurt in her earthly affections and ambitions. She uttered a fierce mental invocation to that other Mother, — her whose heart, pierced by seven swords, had submitted to God's will without a groan!

Valentia, who, it must be remembered, had not

only married a Seldom, but was herself one of that breed, felt at that moment as though this girl of hers were reverting to some mad strain of Pre-Elizabethan fanaticism. There was something mediæval about Vennie's obstinacy, as there was something mediæval about the lines of her face. Valentia recalled a portrait she had once seen of an ancestor of theirs in the days before the Reformation. He, the great Catholic Baron, had possessed the same thin profile and the same pinched lips. It was a curious revenge, the poor lady thought, for those evicted Cistercians, out of whose plundered house the Nevilton mansion had been built, that this fate, of all fates, should befall the last of the Seldoms!

The tolling of the bell, which hitherto had gone on, monotonously and insistently, across the drowsy lawn, suddenly stopped.

Vennie started and ran hurriedly to the door.

"They are burying James Andersen," she cried, "and I ought to be there. It would look unkind and thoughtless of me not to be there. Good-bye, mother! We'll talk of this when I come back. I'm sorry to be so unsatisfactory a daughter to you, but perhaps you'll feel differently some day."

Left to herself, Valentia Seldom rose and went back to her letter. But the pen fell from her limp fingers, and tears stained the already written page.

The funeral service had only just commenced when Vennie reached the churchyard. She remained at the extreme outer edge of the crowd, where groups of inquisitive women are wont to cluster, wearing their aprons and carrying their babies, and where the bigger children are apt to be noisy and troublesome. She

caught a glimpse of Ninsy Lintot among those standing quite close to where Mr. Clavering, in his white surplice, was reading the pregnant liturgical words. She noticed that the girl held her hands to her face and that her slender form was shaking with the stress of her emotion.

She could not see Luke's face, but she was conscious that his motionless figure had lost its upright grace. The young stone-carver seemed to droop, like a sun-flower whose stalk has been bent by the wind.

The words of the familiar English service were borne intermittently to her ears as they fell from the lips of the priest who had once been her friend. It struck her poignantly enough, — that brave human defiance, so solemn and tender, with which humanity seems to rise up in sublime desperation and hoist its standard of hope against hope!

She wondered what the sceptical Luke was feeling all this while. When Mr. Clavering began to read the passage which is prefaced in the Book of Common Prayer by the words, "Then while the earth be cast upon the Body by some standing by, the priest shall say," — the quiet sobs of poor little Ninsy broke into a wail of passionate grief, grief to which Vennie, for all her convert's aloofness from Protestant heresy, could not help adding her own tears.

It was the custom at Nevilton for the bearers of the coffin, when the service was over, to re-form in solemn procession, and escort the chief mourners back to the house from which they had come. It was her knowledge of this custom that led Vennie to steal away before the final words were uttered; and her hurried departure from the churchyard saved her

from being a witness of the somewhat disconcerting event with which the solemn transaction closed.

The bringing of James' body to the church had been unfortunately delayed at the start by the wayward movements of a luggage-train, which persisted in shunting up and down over the level-crossing, at the moment when they were carrying the coffin from the house. This delay had been followed by others, owing to various unforeseen causes, and by the time the service actually began it was already close upon the hour fixed for the confirmation.

Thus it happened that, soon after Vennie's departure, at the very moment when the procession of bearers, followed by Luke and the station-master's wife, issued forth into the street, there drove up to the church-door a two-horsed carriage containing Gladys and her mother, the former all whitely veiled, as if she were a child-bride. Seeing the bearers troop by, the fair-haired candidate for confirmation clutched Mrs. Romer's arm and held her in her place, but leaning forward in the effort of this movement she presented her face at the carriage window, just as Luke himself emerged from the gates.

The two young people found themselves looking one another straight in the eyes, until with a shuddering spasm that shook her whole frame, Gladys sank back into her seat, as if from the effect of a crushing blow received full upon the breast.

Luke passed on, following the bearers, with something like the ghost of a smile upon his drawn and contorted lips.

CHAPTER XXVII

VENNIE SELDOM

IT was not towards her mother's house that Vennie directed her steps when she left the churchyard. She turned sharp to the west, and walked rapidly down the central street of the village into the square at the end of it.

Here she found an arena of busy and stirring confusion, dominated by hissing spouts of steam, hoarse whistlings from the "roundabout" engines, and occasional bursts of extravagant melody, as the circus-men made their musical experiments, pending the opening of the show.

Vennie's intention, in crossing the square, was to pay a morning visit to Mr. Quincunx, whose absence from Andersen's funeral had struck her mind as extraordinary and ominous. She feared that the recluse must be ill. Nothing less than illness, she thought, would have kept him away from such an event. She knew how closely he and the younger stone-carver were associated, and it was inconceivable that any insane jealousy of the dead could have held him at home. Of course it was possible that he had been compelled to go to work at Yeoborough as usual, but she did not think this likely.

It was, however, not only anxiety lest her mother's queer friend should be ill that actuated her. She felt, — now that her ultimatum had been delivered, —

that the sooner she entered the Catholic Church and plunged into her novitiate, the better it would be. When events had *happened*, Mrs. Seldom accepted them. It was during the days of uncertain waiting that her nerves broke down. Once the daughter were actually a postulant in a convent, she felt sure the mother would resign herself, and resume her normal life.

Valentia was a very independent and self-sufficient woman. With her favourite flowers and her favourite biographies of proconsular personages, the girl felt convinced she would be much less heart-broken than she imagined.

Her days in Nevilton being thus numbered, Vennie could not help giving way to a desire that had lately grown more and more definite within her, to have a bold and unhesitating interview with Mr. Quincunx. Perhaps even at this last hour something might be done to save Lacrima from her fate!

Passing along the outskirts of the circus, she could not resist pausing for a moment to observe the numerous groups of well-known village characters, whom curiosity had drawn to the spot.

She was amazed to catch sight of the redoubtable Mr. Wone, holding one of his younger children by the hand and surveying with extreme interest the setting up of a colossal framework of gilded and painted wood, destined to support certain boat-shaped swings. She felt a little indignant with the worthy man for not having been present at Andersen's funeral, but the naive and childlike interest with which, with open mouth and eyes, he stood gaping at this glittering erection, soothed her anger into a

smile. He really was a good sort of man, this poor Wone! She wondered vaguely whether he intended himself to indulge in the pastime of swinging in a boat-shaped swing or whirling round upon a wooden horse. She felt that if she could see him on one of these roundabouts, — especially if he retained that expression of guileless admiration, — she could really forgive him everything.

She caught a glimpse of two other figures whose interest in the proceedings appeared extremely vivid, no less persons than Mr. John Goring and his devoted henchman, Bert Leerd. These two were engaged in reading a glaring advertisement which depicted a young woman clad in astounding spangles dancing on a tight-rope, and it was difficult to say whether the farmer or the idiot was the more absorbed.

She was just turning away, when she heard herself called by name, and from amid a crowd of women clustering round one of Mr. Love's bric-a-brac stalls, there came towards her, together, Mrs. Fringe and Mrs. Wotnot.

Vennie was extremely surprised to find these two ladies, — by no means particularly friendly as a rule, — thus joined in partnership of dissipation, but she supposed the influence of a circus, like the influence of religion, has a dissolvent effect upon human animosity. That these excellent women should have preferred the circus, however, to the rival entertainment in the churchyard, did strike her mind as extraordinary. She did not know that they had, as a matter of fact, "eaten their pot of honey" at the one, before proceeding, post-haste, to enjoy the other.

"May we walk with you, miss, a step?" supplicated Mrs. Fringe, as Vennie indicated her intention of moving on, as soon as their salutations were over.

"Thank you, you are very kind, Mrs. Fringe. Perhaps, — a little way, but I'm rather busy this morning."

"Oh we shan't trouble you long," murmured Mrs. Wotnot, "It's only, — well, Mrs. Fringe, here, had better speak."

Thus it came about that Vennie began her advance up the Yeoborough road supported by the two housekeepers, the lean one on the left of her, and the fat one on the right of her.

"Will I tell her, or will you tell her?" murmured the plump lady sweetly, when they were clear of the village.

Mrs. Wotnot made a curious grimace and clasped and unclasped her hands.

"Better you; much, much better, that it should be you," she remarked.

"But 'twas thy tale, dearie; 'twas thy tale and surprisin' discoverin's," protested Mrs. Fringe.

"Those that knows aren't always those that tells," observed the other sententiously.

"But you do think it's proper and right the young lady should know?" said Mr. Clavering's housekeeper.

Mrs. Wotnot nodded. "If 'taint too shameful for her, 'tis best what she'd a' ought to hear," said the lean woman.

Vennie became conscious at this moment that whenever Mrs. Wotnot opened her mouth there issued thence a most unpleasant smell of brandy, and

it flashed upon her that this was the explanation of the singular converging of these antipodal orbits. In the absence of her master, Mrs. Wotnot had evidently "taken to drink," and it was doubtless out of her protracted intoxication that Mrs. Fringe had derived whatever scandalous piece of gossip it was that she was now so anxious to impart.

"I'll tell 'ee, miss," said Mrs. Fringe, "with no nonsense-fangles and no shilly-shally. I'll tell 'ee straight out and sober, — same as our dear friend did tell it to me. 'Tis along of Miss Romer, — ye be to understand, wot is to be confirmed this same blessed day.

"The dear woman, here, was out a-gatherin' laurel-leaves one fine evenin', long o' some weeks since, and who should she get wind of, in the bushes near-by, but Mr. Luke and Miss Gladys. I been my own self ere now, moon-daft on that there lovely young man, but Satan's ways be Satan's ways, and none shall report that I takes countenance of *such* goings on. Mrs. Wotnot here, she heerd every Jack word them sinful young things did say, — and shameful-awful their words were, God in Heaven do know!

"They were cursin' one another, like to split, that night. She were cryin' and fandanderin' and he were laughin' and chaffin'. 'Twas God's terror to hear how they went on, with the holy bare sky over their shameless heads!"

"Tell the young lady quick and plain," ejaculated Mrs. Wotnot at this point, clutching Vennie's arm and arresting their advance.

"I *am* 'a tellin' her," retorted Mrs. Fringe, "I'm a tellin' as fast as my besom can breathe. Don't 'ee

push a body so! The young lady ain't in such a tantrum-hurry as all that."

"I am *rather* anxious to get on with my walk," threw in Vennie, looking from one to another with some embarrassment, "and I really don't care very much about hearing things of this kind."

"Tell 'er! Tell 'er! Tell 'er!" cried Mrs. Wotnot.

Mrs. Fringe cast a contemptuous look at her rival house-keeper.

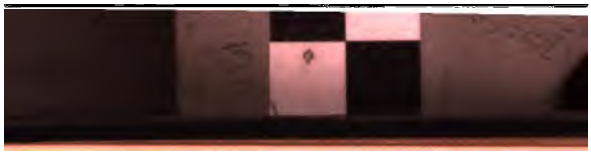
"Our friend baint quite her own self today, miss," she remarked with a wink at Vennie, "the weather or summat' 'ave moved 'er rheumatiz from 'er legs, and settled it in 'er stummick."

"Tell her! Tell her!" reiterated the other.

Mrs. Fringe lowered her voice to a pregnant whisper.

"The truth be, miss, that our friend here heered these wicked young things talk quite open-like about their gay goings on. So plain did they talk, that all wot the Blessed Lord 'is own self do know, of such as most folks keeps to 'emselves, went burnin' and shamin' into our friend's 'stonished ears. And wot she did gather was that Miss Gladys, for certin' and sure, be a lost girl, and Mr. Luke 'as 'ad 'is bit of fun down to the uttermost drop."

The extraordinary solemnity with which Mrs. Fringe uttered these words and the equally extraordinary solemnity with which Mrs. Wotnot nodded her head in corroboration of their truth had a devastating effect upon Vennie. There was no earthly reason why these two females should have invented this squalid story. Mrs. Fringe was an incurable scandal-monger, but Vennie had never found her a



liar. Besides there was a genuine note of shocked sincerity about her tone which no mere morbid suspicion could have evoked.

The thing was true then! Gladys and Luke were lovers, in the most extreme sense of that word, and Dangelis was the victim of an outrageous betrayal.

Vennie had sufficient presence of mind to avoid the eyes of both the women, eyes fixed with ghoulish and lickerish interest upon her, as they watched for the effect of this revelation, — but she was uncomfortably conscious that her cheeks were flaming and her voice strained as she bade them good-bye. Comment, of any kind, upon what they had revealed to her she found absolutely impossible. She could only wish them a pleasant time at the circus if they were returning thither, and freedom from any ill effects due to their accompanying her so far.

When she was alone, and beginning to climb the ascent of Dead Man's Lane, the full implication of what she had learnt thrust itself through her brain like a red-hot wedge. Vennie's experience of the treacherousness of the world had, as we know, gone little deeper than her reaction from the rough discourtesy of Mr. Clavering and the evasive aloofness of Mr. Taxater. This sudden revelation into the brutishness and squalour inherent in our planetary system had the effect upon her of an access of physical nausea. She felt dizzy and sick, as she toiled up the hill, between the wet sun-pierced hedges, and under the heavy September trees.

The feeling of autumn in the air, so pleasant under normal conditions to human senses, seemed to associate itself just now with this dreadful glance she

had had into the basic terrors of things. The whole atmosphere about her seemed to smell of decay, of decomposition, of festering mortality. The pull and draw of the thick Nevilton soil, its horrible demonic gravitation, had never got hold of her more tenaciously than it did then. She felt as though some vast octopus-like tentacles were dragging her earthward.

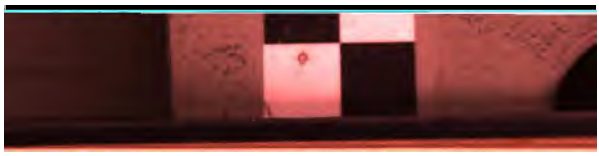
Vennie was one of those rare women for whom, even under ordinary conditions, the idea of sex is distasteful and repulsive. Presented to her as it was now, mingled with treachery and deception, it obsessed her with an almost living presence. Sensuality had always been for her the one unpardonable sin, and sensuality of this kind, turning the power of sex into a mere motive for squalid pleasure-seeking, filled her with a shuddering disgust.

So this was what men and women were like! This was the kind of thing that went on, under the "covert and convenient seeming" of affable lies!

The whole of nature seemed to have become, in one moment, foul and miasmic. Rank vapours rose from the ground at her feet, and the weeds in the hedge took odious and indecent shapes.

An immense wave of distrust swept over her for everyone that she knew. Was Mr. Clavering himself like this?

This thought, — the thought of what, for all she could tell, might exist between her priest-friend and this harlot-girl, — flushed her cheeks with a new emotion. Mixed at that moment with her virginal horror of the whole squalid business, was a pang of quite a different character, a pang that approached,



if it did not reach, the sharp sting of sheer physical jealousy.

As soon as she became aware of this feeling in herself it sickened her with a deeper loathing. Was she also contaminated, like the rest? Was no living human being free from this taint?

She stopped and passed her hand across her forehead. She took off her hat and made a movement with her arms as if thrusting away some invisible assailant. She felt she could not encounter even Mr. Quincunx in this obsessed condition. She had the sensation of being infected by some kind of odious leprosy.

She sat down in the hedge, heedless of the still clinging dew. Strange and desperate thoughts whirled through her brain. She longed to purge herself in some way, to bathe deep, deep, — body and soul,— in some cleansing stream.

But what about Gladys' betrothed? What about the American? Vennie had scarcely spoken to Dangelis, hardly ever seen him, but she felt a wave of sympathy for the betrayed artist surge through her heart. It could not be allowed, — it could not, — that those two false intriguers should fool this innocent gentleman!

Struck by a sudden illumination as if from the unveiled future, she saw herself going straight to Dangelis and revealing the whole story. He should at least be made aware of the real nature of the girl he was marrying!

Having resolved upon this bold step, Vennie recovered something of her natural mood. Where was Mr. Dangelis at this moment? She must find that out, —

perhaps Mr. Quincunx would know. She must make a struggle to waylay the artist, to get an interview with him alone.

She rose to her feet, and holding her hat in her hand, advanced resolutely up the lane. She felt happier now, relieved, in a measure, of that odious sense of confederacy with gross sin which had weighed her down. But there still beat vaguely in her brain a passionate longing for purification. If only she could escape, even for a few hours, from this lust-burdened spot! If only she could cool her forehead in the sea!

As she approached Mr. Quincunx's cottage she experienced a calm and restorative reaction from her distress of mind. She felt no longer alone in the world. Having resolved on a drastic stroke on behalf of clear issues, she was strangely conscious, as she had not been conscious for many months, of the presence, near her and with her, of the Redeemer of men.

It suddenly was borne in upon her that that other criminal abuse, which had so long oppressed her soul with a dead burden, — the affair of Lacrima and Goring, — was intimately associated with what she had discovered. It was more than likely that by exposing the one she could prevent the other.

Flushed with excitement at this thought she opened Mr. Quincunx's gate and walked up his garden-path. To her amazement, she heard voices in the cottage and not only voices, but voices speaking in a language that vaguely reminded her of the little Catholic services in the chapel at Yeoborough.

Mr. Quincunx himself answered her knock and

opened the door. He was strangely agitated. The hand which he extended to her shook as it touched her fingers.

But Vennie herself was too astonished at the sight which met her eyes to notice anything of this. Seated opposite one another, on either side of the solitary's kitchen-fire, were Lacrima and the little Dolores. Vennie had interrupted a lively and impassioned colloquy between the two Italians.

They both rose at her entrance, and their host, in hurried nervous speech, gave Vennie an incoherent account of what had happened.

When they were all seated, — Vennie in the little girl's chair, and the child on Mr. Quincunx's knees, — the embarrassment of the first surprise quickly subsided.

"I shall adopt her," the solitary kept repeating, — as though the words were uttered in a defiance of universal opposition, "I shall adopt her. You'd advise me to do that, wouldn't you Miss Seldom?

"I shall get a proper document made out, so that there can be no mistake. I shall adopt her. Whatever anyone likes to say, I shall adopt her!

"Those circus-scoundrels will hold their tongues and let me alone for their own sakes. I shall have no trouble. Lacrima will explain to the the police who the child is, and who her parents were. That is, if the police come. But they won't come. Why should they come? I shall have a document drawn out."

It seemed as though the little Neapolitan knew by instinct what her protector was saying, for she nestled down against his shoulder and taking one of his hands in both of hers pressed it against her lips.

Vennie gazed at Lacrima, and Lacrima gazed at

Vennie, but neither of them spoke. There was an inner flame of triumphant concentration in Vennie's glance, but Lacrima's look was clouded and sad.

"Certainly no one will interfere with you," said Vennie at last. "We shall all be so glad to think that the child is in such good hands.

"The only difficulty I can see," she paused a moment, while the grey eyes of Mr. Quincunx opened wide and an expression of something like defiance passed over his face, "is that it'll be difficult for you to know what to do with her while you are away in Yeoborough. You could hardly leave her alone in this out-of-the-way place, and I'm afraid our Nevilton National School wouldn't suit her at all."

Mr. Quincunx freed his hand and stroked his beard. His fingers were quivering, and Vennie noticed a certain curious twitching in the muscles of his face.

"I shan't go to Yeoborough any more," he cried. "None of you need think it!

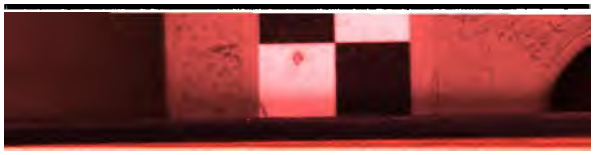
"That affair is over and done with. I shan't stay here, any more, either, to be bullied by the Romers and made a fool of by all these idiots. I shall go away. I shall go — far away — to London — to Liverpool, — to — to Norwich, — like the Man in the Moon!"

This final inspiration brought a flicker of his old goblin-humour to the corners of his mouth.

Lacrima looked at Vennie with an imperceptible lifting of her eyebrows, and then sighed deeply.

The latter clasped the arms of her high-backed chair with firm hands.

"I think it is essential that you should know *where* you are going, Mr. Quincunx. I mean for the child's



sake. You surely don't wish to drag her aimlessly about these great cities while you look for work?

"Besides, — you won't be angry will you, if I speak plainly? — what work, exactly, have you in your mind to do? It isn't, I'm afraid, always easy — "

Mr. Quincunx interrupted her with an outburst of unexpected fury.

"That's what I knew you'd say!" he cried in a loud voice. "That's what *she* says. " He indicated Lacrima. "But you both say it, only because you don't want me to have the pleasure of adopting Dolores!

"But I *shall* adopt her,—in spite of you all. Yes, in spite of you all! Nothing shall stop me adopting her!"

Once more the little Italian nestled close against him, and took possession of his trembling hand.

Vennie perceived an expression of despairing hopelessness pass like an icy mist over Lacrima's face.

The profile of the Nevilton nun assumed those lines of commanding obstinacy which had reminded Valentia a few hours ago of the mediæval baron. She rose to her feet.

"Listen to me, Mr. Quincunx," she said sternly. "You are right; you are quite right, to wish to save this child. No one shall stop you saving her. No one shall stop you adopting her. But there are other people whose happiness depends upon what you do, besides this child."

She paused, and glanced from Mr. Quincunx to Lacrima, and from Lacrima to Mr. Quincunx. Then a look of indescribable domination and power passed into her face. She might have been St. Catharine herself, magnetizing the whole papal court into obedience to her will.

"Oh you foolish people!" she cried, "you foolish people! Can't you see where God is leading you? Can't you see where His Spirit has brought you?"

She turned upon Mr. Quincunx with shining eyes, while Lacrima, white as a phantom and with drooping mouth, watched her in amazement.

"It's not only this child He's helped you to save," she went on. "It's not only this child! Are you blind to what He means? Don't you understand the cruelty that is being done to your friend? Don't you understand?"

She stretched out her arm and touched Mr. Quincunx's shoulder.

"You must do more than give this little one a father," she murmured in a low tone, "you must give her a mother. How can she be happy without a mother?

"Come," she went on, in a voice vibrating with magnetic authority, "there's no other way. You and Lacrima must join hands. You must join hands at once, and defy everyone. Our little wanderer must have both father and mother! That is what God intends."

There was a long and strange silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock.

Then Mr. Quincunx slowly rose, allowed the child to sink down into his empty chair, and crossed over to Lacrima's side. Very solemnly, and as if registering a sacred vow, he took his friend's head between his hands and kissed her on the forehead. Then, searching for her hand and holding it tightly in his own, he turned towards Vennie, while Lacrima herself, pressing her face against his shabby coat, broke into convulsive crying.

"I'll take your advice," he said gravely. "I'll take it without question. There are more difficulties in the way than you know, but I'll do, — we'll do, — just what you tell us. I can't think —" he hesitated for a moment, while a curious smile flickered across his face, "how on earth I'm going to manage. I can't think how we're going to get away from here. But I'll take your advice and we'll do exactly as you say.

"We'll do what she says, won't we, Lacrima?"

Lacrima's only answer was to conceal her face still more completely in his dusty coat, but her crying became quieter and presently ceased altogether.

At that moment there came a sharp knock a the door.

The countenance of Mr. Quincunx changed. He dropped his friend's hand, and moved into the centre of the room.

"That must be the circus-people," he whispered. "They've come for Dolores. You'll support me won't you?" He looked imploringly at Vennie. "You'll tell them they can't have her — that I refuse to give her up — that I'm going to adopt her?"

He went out and opened the door.

It was not the circus-men he found waiting on his threshold. Nor was it the police. It was only one of the under-gardeners from Nevilton House. The youth explained that Mr. Romer had sent him to fetch Lacrima.

"They be goin' to lunch early, mistress says, and the young lady 'ave to come right along 'ome wi' I."

Vennie intervened at this moment between her agitated host and the intruder.

"I'll bring Miss Traffio home," she said sternly, "when she's ready to come. You may go back and tell Mrs. Romer that she's with me, — with Miss Seldom."

The youth touched his hat, and slouched off, without further protest.

Vennie, returning into the kitchen, found Mr. Quincunx standing thoughtfully by the mantel-piece, stroking his beard, and the two Italians engaged in an excited conversation in their own tongue.

The descendant of the lords of Nevilton meditated for a moment with drooping head, her hands characteristically clasped behind her back. When she lifted up her chin and began to speak, there was the same concentrated light in her eyes and the same imperative tone in her voice.

"The thing for us to do," she said, speaking hurriedly but firmly, "is to go — all four of us — straight away from here! I'm not going to leave you until things are settled. I'm going to get you all clean out of this, — clean away!"

She paused and looked at Lacrima. "Where's Mr. Dangelis?" she asked.

Lacrima explained how the artist had written to Gladys that he was staying until the following day at the Gloucester Hotel in Weymouth.

Vennie's face became radiant when she heard this. "Ah!" she cried, "God is indeed fighting for us! It's Dangelis that I must see, and see at once. Where better could we all go, — at any rate for tonight — than to Weymouth? We'll think later what must be done next. Dangelis will help us. I'm perfectly certain he'll help us.

"Oh yes, we'll go to Weymouth at once, — before there's any risk of the Romers stopping us! We'll walk to Yeoborough — that'll give us time to think out our plans — and take the train from there.

"I'll send a telegram to my mother late tonight, when there's no chance of her communicating with the House. As to being seen in Yeoborough by any Nevilton people, we must risk that! God has been so good to us today that I can't believe He won't go on being good to us.

"Oh what a relief it'll be, — what a relief, — to get away from Nevilton! And I shall be able to dip my hands in the sea!"

While these rapid utterances fell from Vennie's excited lips, the face of Mr. Quincunx was a wonder to look upon. It was the crisis of his days, and he displayed his knowledge that it was so by more convulsive changes of expression, than perhaps, in an equal stretch of time, had ever crossed the visage of a mortal man.

"We'll take your advice," he said, at last, with immense solemnity.

Lacrima looked at him wistfully. Her face was very pale and her lips trembled.

"It isn't only because of the child, is it, that he's ready to go?" she murmured, clutching at Vennie's arm, as Mr. Quincunx retired to make his brief preparations. "I shouldn't like to think it was only that. But he *is* fond of me. He *is* fond of me!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

LODMOOR

IT was Mr. Quincunx who had to find the money for their bold adventure. Neither Vennie nor Lacrima could discover a single penny on their persons. Mr. Quincunx produced it from the bottom of an old jam-pot placed in the interior recesses of one of his deepest cupboards. He displayed to his three friends, with not a little pride, the sum he was possessed of, — no less in fact than five golden sovereigns.

Their walk to Yeoborough was full of thrilling little excitements. Three times they concealed themselves on the further side of the hedge, to let certain suspicious pedestrians, who might be Nevilton people, pass by unastonished.

Once well upon their way, they all four felt a strange sense of liberation and expansion. The little Neapolitan walked between Mr. Quincunx and Lacrima, a hand given to each, and her childish high spirits kept them all from any apprehensive brooding.

Once and once only, they looked back, and Mr. Quincunx shook his fist at the two distant hills.

"You are right," he remarked to Vennie, "it's the sea we're in want of. These curst inland fields have the devil in their heavy mould."

They found themselves, when they reached the town, with an hour to spare before their train started,

and entering a little dairy-shop near the station, they refreshed themselves with milk and bread-and-butter. Here Mr. Quincunx and the child waited in excited expectation, while the two girls went out to make some necessary purchases — returning finally, in triumph, with a light wicker-work suit-case, containing all that they required for several days and nights.

They were in the train at last, with a compartment to themselves, and, as far as they could tell, quite undiscovered by anyone who knew them.

Vennie had hardly ever in her life enjoyed anything more than she enjoyed that journey. She felt that the stars were fighting on her side or, to put it in terms of her religion, that God Himself was smoothing the road in front of her.

She experienced a momentary pang when the train, at last, passing along the edge of the backwater, ran in to Weymouth Station. It was so sweet, so strangely sweet, to know that three living souls depended upon her for their happiness, for their escape from the power of the devil! Would she feel like this, would she ever feel quite like this, when the convent-doors shut her away from this exciting world?

They emerged from the crowded station, — Mr. Quincunx carrying the wicker-work suit-case — and made their way towards the Esplanade.

The early afternoon sun lay hot upon the pavements, but from the sea a strong fresh wind was blowing. Both the girls shivered a little in their thin frocks, and as the red shawl of the young Italian had already excited some curiosity among the passers-

by, they decided to enter one of the numerous drapery shops, and spend some more of Mr. Quincunx's money.

They were so long in the shop that the nervous excitement of the recluse was on the point of changing into nervous irritation, when at last they reappeared. But he was reconciled to the delay when he perceived the admirable use they had made of it.

All three were wearing long tweed rain-cloaks of precisely the same tint of sober grey. They looked like three sisters, newly arrived from some neighbouring inland town, — Dorchester, perhaps, or Sherborne, — with a view to spending a pleasant afternoon at the sea-side. Not only were they all wrapped in the same species of cloak. They had purchased three little woollen caps of a similar shade, such things as it would have been difficult to secure in any shop but a little unfashionable one, where summer and winter vogues casually overlapped.

Mr. Quincunx, whose exaltation of mood had not made him forget to bring his own overcoat with him, now put this on, and warmly and comfortably clad, the four fugitives from Nevilton strolled along the Esplanade in the direction of St. John's church.

To leave his three companions free to run down to the sea's edge, Mr. Quincunx possessed himself of the clumsy paper parcels containing the hats they had relinquished and also of the little girl's red shawl, and resting on a seat with these objects piled up by his side he proceeded to light a cigarette and gaze placidly about him. The worst of his plunge into activity being over, — for, whatever happened, the initial effort was bound to be the worst, — the wanderer

from Dead Man's Lane chuckled to himself with bursts of cynical humour as he contemplated the situation they were in.

But what a relief it was to see the clear-shining foam-sprinkled expanse of water lying spread out before him! Like the younger Andersen, Mr. Quincunx had a passionate love of Weymouth, and never had he loved it more than he did at that moment! He greeted the splendid curve of receding cliffs — the White Nore and St. Alban's head — with a sigh of profound satisfaction, and he looked across to the massive bulk of Portland, as though in its noble uncrumbling stone — stone that was so much nearer to marble than to clay — there lurked some occult talisman ready to save him from everything connected with Leo's Hill.

Yes, the sea was what he wanted just then! How well the salt taste of it, the smell of its sun-bleached stranded weeds, its wide horizons, its long-drawn murmur, blent with the strange new mood into which that morning's events had thrown him!

How happy the little Dolores looked, between Lacrima and Vennie, her dark curls waving in the wind from beneath her grey cap!

All at once his mind reverted to James Andersen, lying now alone and motionless, under six feet of yellow clay. Mr. Quincunx shivered. After all it was something to be alive still, something to be still able to stroke one's beard and stretch one's legs, and fumble in one's pocket for a "Three Castles" cigarette!

He wondered vaguely how and when this young St. Catharine of theirs intended to marry him to

Lacrima. And then what? Would he have to work frightfully, preposterously hard?

He chuckled to himself to think how blank Mr. Romer would look, when he found that both his victims had been spirited away in one breath. What a girl this Vennie Seldom was!

He tried to imagine what it would be like, this business of being married. After all, he *was* very fond of Lacrima. He hoped that dusky wavy hair of hers were as long as it suggested that it was! He liked girls to have long hair.

Would she bring him his tea in the morning, sometimes, with bare arms and bare feet? Would she sit cross-legged at the foot of his bed, while he drank it, and chatter to him of what they would do when he came back from his work?

His work! That was an aspect of the affair which certainly might well be omitted.

And then, as he stared at the three girlish figures on the beach, there came over him the strange illusion that both Vennie and Lacrima were only dream-people — unreal and fantastic — and that the true living persons of his drama were himself and his little Neapolitan waif.

Suppose the three girls were to take a boat — one of those boats whose painted keels he saw glittering now so pleasantly on the beach — and row out into the water. And suppose the boat were upset and both Vennie and Lacrima drowned? Would he be so sad to have to live the rest of his life alone with the little Dolores?

Perhaps it would be better if this event occurred after Vennie had helped him to secure some work to

do — some not too hard work! Well — Vennie, at any rate, *was* going to be drowned in a certain sense, at least she was meditating entering a convent, and that was little different from being drowned, or being buried in yellow clay, like James Andersen!

But Lacrima was not meditating entering a convent. Lacrima was meditating being married to him, and being a mother to their adopted child. He hoped she would be a gentle mother. If she were not, if she ever spoke crossly to Dolores, he would lose his temper. He would lose his temper so much that he would tremble from head to foot! He called up an imaginary scene between them, a scene so vivid that he found himself trembling now, as his hand rested upon the paper parcel.

But perhaps, if by chance they left England and went on a journey, — Witch-Bessie had found a journey, "a terrible journey," in the lines of his hand, —Lacrima would catch a fever in some foreign city, and he and Dolores would be left alone, quite as alone as if she were drowned today!

But perhaps it would be he, Maurice Quincunx, who would catch the fever. No! He did not like these "terrible journeys." He preferred to sit on a seat on Weymouth Esplanade and watch Dolores laughing and running into the sea and picking up shells.

The chief thing was to be alive, and not too tired, or too cold, or too hungry, or too harassed by insolent aggressive people! How delicious a thing life could be if it were only properly arranged! If cruelty, and brutality, and vulgarity, and *office-work*, were removed!

He could never be cruel to anyone. From that worst sin, — if one could talk of such a thing as sin in this mad world, — his temperament entirely saved him. He hoped when they were married that Lacrima would not want him to be too sentimental about her. And he rather hoped that he would still have his evenings to himself, to turn over the pages of Rabelais, when he had kissed Dolores good night.

His meditations were interrupted at this point by the return of his companions, who came scrambling across the shingle, threading their way among the boats, laughing and talking merrily, and trailing long pieces of sea-weed in their hands.

Vennie announced that since it was nearly four o'clock it would be advisable for them to secure their lodging for the night, and when that was done she would leave them to their own devices for an hour or two, while she proceeded to the Gloucester Hotel to have her interview with Ralph Dangelis.

Their various sea-spoils being all handed over to the excited little foundling, they walked slowly along the Esplanade, still bearing to the east, while they surveyed the appearance of the various "crescents," "terraces," and "rows" on the opposite side of the street. It was not till they arrived at the very end of these, that Vennie, who had assumed complete responsibility for their movements, piloted them across the road.

The houses they now approached were entitled "Brunswick Terrace," and they entirely fulfilled their title by suggesting, in the pleasant liberality of their bay-windows and the mellow dignity of their well-proportioned fronts, the sort of solid comfort which

the syllables "Brunswick" seem naturally to convey. They began their enquiries for rooms, about five doors from the end of the terrace, but it was not till they reached the last house, — the last except two reddish-coloured ones of later date, — that they found what they wanted.

It was arranged that the two Italians should share a room together. Vennie elected to sleep in a small apartment adjoining theirs, while Mr. Quincunx was given a front-room, looking out on the sea, on the third floor.

Vennie smiled to herself as she thought how amazed her mother would have been could she have seen her at that moment, as she helped Lacrima to unpack their solitary piece of luggage, while Mr. Quincunx smoked cigarettes in the balcony of the window!

She left them finally in the lodging-house parlour, seated on a horse-hair sofa, watching the prim landlady preparing tea. Vennie refused to wait for this meal, being anxious — she said — to get her interview with the American well over, for until that moment had been reached, she could neither discuss their future plans calmly, nor enjoy the flavour of the adventure.

When Vennie had left them, and the three were all comfortably seated round the table, Mr. Quincunx found Lacrima in so radiant a mood that he began to feel a little ashamed of his ambiguous meditations on the Esplanade. She was, after all, quite beautiful in her way, — though, of course, not as beautiful as the young Neapolitan, whose eyes had a look in them, even when she was happy, which haunted one and filled one with vague indescribable emotions.

Mr. Quincunx himself was in the best of spirits. His beard wagged, his nostrils quivered, his wit flowed. Lacrima fixed her eyes upon him with delighted appreciation, — and led him on and on, through a thousand caprices of fancy. The poor Pariah's heart was full of exquisite happiness. She felt like one actually liberated from the tomb. For the first time since she had known anything of England she was able to breathe freely and spontaneously and be her natural self.

For some queer reason or other, her thoughts kept reverting to James Andersen, but reverting to him with neither sadness nor pity. She felt no remorse for not having been present when he was buried that morning. She did not feel as though he were buried. She did not feel as though he were dead. She felt, in some strange way, that he had merely escaped from the evil spells of Nevilton, and that in the power of his new strength he was the cause of her own emancipation.

And what an emancipation it was! It was like suddenly becoming a child again — a child with power to enjoy the very things that children so often miss.

Everything in this little parlour pleased her. The blue vases on the mantelpiece containing dusty "everlasting flowers," the plush-framed portraits of the landlady's deceased parents, enlarged to a magnitude of shadowy dignity by some old-fashioned photographic process, the quaint row of minute china elephants that stood on a little bracket in the corner, the glaring antimacassar thrown across the back of the armchair, the sea-scents and sea-murmurs floating in through the window, the melodious crying

of a fish-pedler in the street; all these things thrilled her with a sense of freedom and escape, which overbrimmed her heart with happiness.

What matter, after all, she thought, that her little compatriot with the wonderful eyes had been the means of arousing her friend from his inertia! Her long acquaintance with Mr. Quincunx had mellowed her affection for him into a tenderness that was almost maternal. She could even find it in her to be glad that she was to be saved from the burden of struggling alone with his fits of melancholia. With Dolores to keep him amused, and herself to look after his material wants, it seemed probable that, whatever happened, the dear man would be happier than he had ever dreamed of being!

The uncertainty of their future weighed upon her very little. She had the true Pariah tendency to lie back with arms outstretched upon the great tide, and let it carry her whither it pleased. She had done this so long, while the tide was dark and evil, that to do it where the waters gleamed and shone was a voluptuous delight.

While her protégées were thus enjoying themselves Vennie sought out and entered, with a resolute bearing, the ancient Gloucester Hotel. The place had recently been refitted according to modern notions of comfort, but in its general lines, and in a certain air it had of liberal welcoming, it preserved the Georgian touch.

She was already within the hall-way when, led by an indefinable impulse to look back, she caught sight of Dangelis himself walking rapidly along the Esplanade towards the very quarter from which she had just

come. Without a moment's hesitation she ran down the steps, crossed the road and followed him.

The American seemed to be inspired by some mania for fast walking that afternoon. Vennie was quite breathless before she succeeded in approaching him, and she did not manage to do this until they were both very nearly opposite Brunswick Terrace.

Just here she was unwilling to make herself known, as her friends might at any moment emerge from their lodging. She preferred to follow the long strides of the artist still further, till, in fact he had led her, hot and exhausted in her new cloak, quite beyond the limits of the houses.

Where the town ceases, on this eastern side, a long white dusty road leads across a mile or two of level ground before the noble curve of cliffs ending in St. Alban's Head has its beginning. This road is bounded on one hand by a high bank of shingle and on the other by a wide expanse of salt-marshes known in that district under the name of Lodmoor. It was not until the American had emerged upon this solitary road that his pursuer saw fit to bring him to a halt.

"Mr. Dangelis!" she called out, "Mr. Dangelis!"

He swung round in astonishment at hearing his name. For the first moment he did not recognize Vennie. Her newly purchased attire, — not to speak of her unnaturally flushed cheeks, — had materially altered her appearance. When she held out her hand, however, and stopped to take breath, he realized who she was.

"Oh Mr. Dangelis," she gasped, "I've been following you all the way from the Hotel. I so want to

talk to you. You *must* listen to me. It's very, very important!"

He held his hat in his hand, and regarded her with smiling amazement.

"Well, Miss Seldom, you *are* an astonishing person. Is you mother here? Are you staying at Weymouth? How did you catch sight of me? Certainly — by all means — tell me your news! I long to hear this thing that's so important."

He made as if he would return with her to the town, but she laid her hand on his arm.

"No — no! let's walk on quietly here. I can talk to you better here."

The roadway, however, proved so disconcerting, owing to great gusts of wind which kept driving the sand and dust along its surface, that before Vennie had summoned up courage to begin her story, they found it necessary to debouch to their left and enter the marshy flats of Lodmoor. They took their way along the edge of a broad ditch, whose black peat-bottomed waters were overhung by clumps of "Michaelmas daisies" and sprinkled with weird glaucous-leafed plants. It was a place of a singular character, owing to the close encounter in it of land and sea, and it seemed to draw the appeal of its strange desolation almost equally from both these sources.

Vennie, on the verge of speaking, found her senses in a state of morbid alertness. Everything she felt and saw at that moment lodged itself with poignant sharpness in her brain and returned to her mind long afterwards. So extreme was her nervous tension that she found it difficult to disentangle her thoughts from all these outward impressions.

The splash of a water-rat became an episode in her suspended revelation. The bubbles rising from the movements of an eel in the mud got mixed with the image of Mrs. Wotnot picking laurel-leaves. The flight of a sea-gull above their heads was a projection of Dangelis' escape from the spells of his false mistress. The wind shaking the reeds was the breath of her fatal news ruffling the man's smiling attention. The wail of the startled plovers was the cry of her own heart, calling upon all the spirits of truth and justice, to make him believe her words.

She told him at last, — told him everything, walking slowly by his side with her eyes cast down and her hands clasped tight behind her.

When she had finished, there was an immense intolerable silence, and slowly, very slowly, she permitted her glance to rise to her companion's face, to grasp the effect of her narration upon him.

How rare it is that these world-shaking revelations produce the impression one has anticipated! To Vennie's complete amazement, — and even, it must be allowed, a little to her dismay, —Dangelis regarded her with a frank untroubled smile.

"You, — I —" she stammered, and stopped abruptly. Then, before he could answer her, "I didn't know you knew all this. Did you really know it, — and not mind? Don't people mind these things in — in other countries?"

Dangelis spoke at last. "Oh, yes of course, we mind as much as any of you; that is to say, if we *do* mind, — but you must remember, Miss Seldom, there are circumstances, situations, — there are, in

fact feelings, — which make these things sometimes rather a relief than otherwise!"

He threw up his stick in the air, as he spoke, and caught it as it descended.

"Pardon me, one moment, I want — I want to see if I can jump this ditch."

He threw both stick and hat on the ground, and to Vennie's complete amazement, stepped back a pace or two, and running desperately to the brink of the stream cleared it with a bound. He repeated this manœuvre from the further bank, and returned, breathing hard and fast, to the girl's side.

Picking up his hat and stick, he uttered a wild series of barbaric howls, such howls as Vennie had never, in her life, heard issuing from the mouth of man or beast. Had Gladys' treachery turned his brain?

But no madman could possibly have smiled the friendly boyish smile with which he greeted her when this performance was over.

"So sorry if I scared you," he said. "Do you know what that is? It's our college 'yell.' It's what we do at base-ball games."

Vennie thought he was going to do it again, and in her apprehension she laid a hand on his sleeve.

"But don't you really mind Miss Romer's being like this? Did you know she was like this?' she enquired.

"Don't let's think about her any more," cried the artist. "I don't care what she's like, now I can get rid of her. To tell you the honest truth, Miss Seldom, I'd come down here for no other reason than to think over this curst hole I've got myself into, and to devise some way out.

"What you tell me, — and I believe every word of it, I want to believe every word of it! — just gives me the excuse I need. Good-bye, Miss Gladys! Good-bye, Ariadne! 'Ban-ban, Ca-Caliban, Have a new master, get a new man!' No more engagements for me, dear Miss Seldom! I'm a free lance now, a free lance, — henceforward and forever!"

The exultant artist was on the point of indulging once more in his college yell, but the scared and bewildered expression on Vennie's face saved her from a second experience of that phenomenon.

"Shall I tell you what I was thinking of doing, as I strolled along the Front this afternoon?"

Vennie nodded, unable to repress a smile as she remembered the difficulty she had in arresting this stroll.

"I was thinking of taking the boat for the Channel Islands tomorrow! I even went so far as to make enquiries about the time it started. What do you think of that?"

Vennie thought it was extremely singular, and she also thought that she had never heard the word "enquiries" pronounced in just that way.

"It leaves quite early, at nine in the morning. And it's *some* boat, — I can tell you that!"

"Well," continued Vennie, recovering by degrees that sense of concentrated power which had accompanied her all day, "what now? Are you still going to sail by it?"

"That's — a — large — proposition," answered her interlocutor slowly. "I — I rather think I *am!*"

One effect of his escape from his Nevilton enchantress seemed to be an irrepressible tendency to relapse into the American vernacular.

They continued advancing along the edge of the ditch, side by side.

Vennie plunged into the matter of Lacrima and Mr. Quincunx.

She narrated all she knew of this squalid and sinister story. She enlarged upon the two friends' long devotion to one another. She pictured the wickedness and shame of the projected marriage with John Goring. Finally she explained how it had come about that both Mr. Romer's slaves, and with them the little circus-waif, were at that moment in Weymouth.

"And so you've carried them off?" cried the Artist in high glee. "Bless my soul, but I admire you for it! And what are you going to do with them now?"

Vennie looked straight into his eyes. "That is where I want *your* help, Mr. Dangelis!"

It was late in the evening before the citizen of Toledo, Ohio, and the would-be Postulant of the Sacred Heart parted from one another opposite the Jubilee Clock.

A reassuring telegram had been sent to Mrs. Seldom announcing Vennie's return in the course of the following day.

As for the rest, all had been satisfactorily arranged. The American had displayed overpowering generosity. He seemed anxious to do penance for his obsession by the daughter, by lavishing benefactions upon the victims of the father. Perhaps it seemed to him that this was the best manner of paying back the debt, which his æsthetic imagination owed to the suggestive charms of the Nevilton landscape.

He made himself, in a word, completely responsible for the three wanderers. He would carry them off

with him to the Channel Isles, and either settle them down there, or make it possible for them to cross thence to France, and from France, if so they pleased, on to Lacrima's home in Italy. He would come to an arrangement with his bankers to have handed over definitely to Mr. Quincunx a sum that would once and for all put him into a position of financial security.

"I'd have paid a hundred times as much as that," he laughingly assured Vennie, "to have got clear of my mix-up with that girl."

Thus it came about that at nine o'clock on the day which followed the burial of James Andersen, Vennie, standing on the edge of the narrow wharf, between railway-trucks and hawsers, watched the ship with the red funnels carry off the persons who — under Heaven — were the chief cause of the stone-carver's death.

As the four figures, waving to her over the ship's side grew less and less distinct, Vennie felt an extraordinary and unaccountable desire to burst into a fit of passionate weeping. She could not have told why she wept, nor could she have told whether her tears were tears of relief or of desolation, but something in the passing of that brightly-painted ship round the corner of the little break-water, gave her a different emotion from any she had ever known in her life.

When at last she turned her back to the harbour, she asked the way to the nearest Catholic Church, but in place of following the directions given her, she found herself seated on the shingles below Brunswick Terrace, watching the in-drawing and out-flowing waves.

How strange this human existence was! Long after

the last block of Leonian stone had been removed from its place — long after the stately pinnacles of Nevilton House had crumbled into shapeless ruins, — long after the memory of all these people's troubles had been erased and forgotten, — this same tide would fling itself upon this same beach, and its voice then would be as its voice now, restless, unsatisfied, unappeased.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GOAT AND BOY

IT was the middle of October. Francis Taxater and Luke Andersen sat opposite one another over a beer-stained table in the parlour of the Goat and Boy. The afternoon was drawing to its close and the fire in the little grate threw a warm ruddy light through the darkening room.

Outside the rain was falling, heavily, persistently, — the sort of rain that by long-continued importunity finds its way through every sort of obstacle. For nearly a month this rain had lasted. It had come in with the equinox, and Heaven knew how long it was going to stay. It had so thoroughly drenched all the fields, woods, lanes, gardens and orchards of Nevilton, that a palpable atmosphere of charnel-house chilliness pervaded everything. Into this atmosphere the light sank at night like a thing drowned in deep water, and into this atmosphere the light rose at dawn like something rising from beneath the sea.

The sun itself, as a definite presence, had entirely disappeared. It might have fallen into fathomless space, for all the visible signs it gave of its existence. The daylight seemed a pallid entity, diffused through the lower regions of the air, unconnected with any visible fount of life or warmth.

The rain seemed to draw forth from the earth all

the accumulated moisture of centuries of damp autumns, while between the water below the firmament and the water above the firmament, — between the persistent deluge from the sky and the dampness exuded from the earth, — the death-stricken multitudinous leaves of Nevilton drifted to their morgue in the cart-ruts and ditches.

The only object in the vicinity whose appearance seemed to suffer no change from this incursion of many waters was Leo's Hill. Leo's Hill looked as if it loved the rain, and the rain looked as if it loved Leo's Hill. In no kind of manner were its familiar outlines affected, except perhaps in winning a certain added weight, by reason of the fact that its rival Mount had been stripped of its luxuriant foliage.

"So our dear Mr. Romer has got his Freight Bill through," said Luke, sipping his glass of whiskey and smiling at Mr. Taxater. "He at any rate then won't be worried by this rain."

"I'm to dine with him tomorrow," answered the papal champion, "so I shall have an opportunity of discovering what he's actually gained by this."

"I wish I'd had James cremated," muttered Luke, staring at the fire-place, into which the rain fell down the narrow chimney.

Mr. Taxater crossed himself.

"What do you really feel," enquired the younger man abruptly, "about the chances in favour of a life after death?"

"The Church," answered Mr. Taxater, stirring his rum and sugar with a spoon, "could hardly be expected to formulate a dogma denying such a hope. The true spirit of her attitude towards it may per-

haps be best understood in the repetition of her requiem prayer, 'Save us from eternal death!' We none of us want eternal death, my friend, though many of us are very weary of this particular life. I do not know that I am myself, however. But that may be due to the fact that I am a real sceptic. To love life, Andersen, one cannot be too sceptical."

"Upon my soul I believe you!" answered the stone-carver, "but I cannot quite see how *you* can make claim to that title."

"You're not a philosopher my friend," said Mr. Taxater, leaning his elbows on the table and fixing a dark but luminous eye upon his interlocutor.

"If you were a philosopher you would know that to be a true sceptic it is necessary to be a Catholic. You, for instance, aren't a sceptic, and never can be. You're a dogmatic materialist. You doubt everything in the world except doubt. I doubt doubt."

Luke rose and poked the fire.

"I'm afraid my little Annie'll be frightfully wet," he remarked, "when she gets home tonight. I wish that last train from Yeoborough wasn't quite so late."

"Do you propose to go down to the station to meet her?" enquired Mr. Taxater.

Luke sighed. "I suppose so," he said. "That's the worst of being married. There's always something or other interfering with the main purpose of life."

"May I ask what the main purpose of life may be?" said the theologian.

"Talking with you, of course," replied the young man smiling; "talking with any friend. Oh damn! I can't tell you how I miss going up to Dead Man's Cottage."

"Yes," said the great scholar meditatively, "women are bewitching creatures, especially when they're very young or very old, but they aren't exactly arresting in conversation."

Luke became silent, meditating on this.

"They throw out little things now and then," he said. "Annie does. But they've no sense of proportion. If they're happy they're thrilled by everything, and if they're unhappy, — well, you know how it is! They don't bite at the truth, for the sake of biting, and they never get to the bone. They just lick the gloss of things with the tips of their tongues. And they quiver and vibrate so, you never know where they are, or what they've got up their sleeve that tickles them."

Mr. Taxater lifted his glass to his mouth and carefully replaced it on the table. There was something in this movement of his plump white fingers which always fascinated Luke. Mr. Taxater's hands looked as though, beyond the pen and the wine-cup, they never touched any earthly object.

"Have you heard any more of Philip Wone?" enquired the stone-carver.

The theologian shook his head. "I'm afraid, since he went up to London, he's really got entangled in these anarchist plots."

"I'm not unselfish enough to be an anarchist," said Luke, "but I sympathize with their spirit. The sort of people I can't stand are these Christian Socialists. What really pleases me, I suppose, is the notion of a genuine aristocracy, an aristocracy as revolutionary as anarchists in their attitude to morals and such things, an aristocracy that's flung up out of

this mad world, as a sort of exquisite flower of chance and accident, an aristocracy that is *worth* all this damned confusion!"

Mr. Taxater smiled. It always amused him when Luke Andersen got excited in this way, and began catching his breath and gesticulating. He seemed to have heard these remarks on other occasions. He regarded them as a signal that the stone-carver had drunk more whiskey than was good for him. When completely himself Luke talked of girls and of death. When a little depressed he abused either Nonconformists or Socialists. When in the early stages of intoxication he eulogized the upper classes.

"It's a pity," said the theologian, "that Ninsy couldn't bring herself to marry that boy. There's something morbid in the way she talks. I met her in Nevil's Gully yesterday, and I had quite a long conversation with her."

Luke looked sharply at him. "Have you yourself ever seen her, across there?" he asked making a gesture in the direction of the churchyard.

Mr. Taxater shook his head. "Have you?" he demanded.

Luke nodded.

A sudden silence fell upon them. The rain beat in redoubled fury upon the window, and they could hear it pattering on the roof and falling in a heavy stream from the pipe above the eaves.

The younger man felt as though some tragic intimation, uttered in a tongue completely beyond the reach of both of them, were beating about for entry, at closed shutters.

Mr. Taxater felt no sensation of this kind. "*Non*

est reluctandum cum Deo" were the sage words with which he raised his glass to his lips.

Luke remained motionless staring at the window, and thinking of a certain shrouded figure, with hollow cheeks and crossed hands, to whom this rain was nothing, and less than nothing.

Once more there was silence between them, as though a flock of noiseless night-birds were flying over the house, on their way to the far-off sea.

"How is Mrs. Seldom getting on?" enquired Luke, pushing back his chair. "Is Vennie allowed to write to her from that place?"

The theologian smiled. "Oh, the dear lady is perfectly happy! In fact, I think she's really happier than when she was worrying herself about Vennie's future."

"I don't like these convents," remarked Luke.

"Few people like them," said the papal champion, "who have never entered them.

"I've never seen an unhappy nun. They are almost too happy. They are like children. Perhaps they're the only persons in existence who know what continual, as opposed to spasmodic, happiness means. The happiness of sanctity is a secret that has to be concealed from the world, just as the happiness of certain very vicious people has, — for fear there should be no more marriages."

"Talking of marriages," remarked Luke, "I'd give anything to know how our friend Gladys is getting on with Clavering. I expect his attitude of heroic pity has worn a little thin by this time. I wonder how soon the more earthly side of the shield will wear thin too! But — poor dear girl! — I do feel

sorry for her. Fancy having to listen to the Reverend Hugh's conversation by night and by day!

"I sent her a picture post-card, the other afternoon, from Yeoborough — a comic one. I wonder if she snapped it up, and hid it, before her husband came down to breakfast!"

The jeering tone of the man jarred a little on Mr. Taxater's nerves.

"I think I understand," he thought to himself, "why it is that he praises the aristocracy."

To change the conversation, he reverted to Miss Seldom's novitiate.

"Vennie was very indignant with me for remaining so long in London, but I am glad now that I did. None of our little arrangements — eh, my friend? — would have worked out so well as her Napoleonic directness. That shows how wise it is to stand aside sometimes and let things take their course."

"Romer doesn't stand aside," laughed Luke. "I'd give a year of my life to know what he felt when Dangelis carried those people away! But I suppose we shall never know.

"I wonder if it's possible that there's any truth in that strange idea of Vennie's that Leo's Hill has a definite evil power over this place? Upon my soul I'm almost inclined to wish it has! God, how it does rain!"

He looked at his watch. "I shall have to go down to the station in a minute," he remarked.

One curious feature of this conversation between the two men was that there began to grow up a deep and vague irritation in Mr. Taxater's mind against his companion. Luke's tone when he alluded to that

picture-card — "a comic one" — struck him as touching a depth of cynical inhumanity.

The theologian could not help thinking of that gorgeous-coloured image of the wayward girl, represented as Ariadne, which now hung in the entrance-hall of her father's house. He recalled the magnificent pose of the figure, and its look of dreamy exultation. Somehow, the idea of this splendid heathen creature being the wife of Clavering struck his mind as a revolting incongruity. For such a superb being to be now stretching out hopeless arms towards her Nevilton lover, — an appeal only answered by comic post-cards, — seemed to him a far bitterer commentary upon the perversity of the world than that disappearance of Vennie into a convent which so shocked Luke.

He extended his legs and fumbled with the gold cross upon his watch-chain. He seemed so clearly to visualize the sort of look which must now be settling down on that pseudo-priest's ascetic face. He gave way to an immoral wish that Clavering might take to drink. He felt as though he would sooner have seen Gladys fallen to the streets than thus made the companion of a monkish apostate.

He wondered how on earth it had been managed that Mr. Romer had remained ignorant of the cause of Dangelis' flight and the girl's precipitate marriage. It was inconceivable that he should be aware of these things and yet retain this imperturbable young man in his employment. How craftily Gladys must have carried the matter through! Well, — she was no doubt paying the penalty of her double-dyed

deceptions now. The theologian experienced a sick disgust with the whole business.

The rain increased in violence. It seemed as though the room where they sat was isolated from the whole world by a flood of down-pouring waves. The gods of the immense Spaces were weeping, and man, in his petty preoccupation, could only mutter and stare.

Luke rose to his feet. "To Romer and his Stone-Works," he cried, emptying his glass at one gulp down his throat, "and may he make me their Manager!"

Mr. Taxater also rose. "To the tears that wash away all these things," he said, "and the Necessity that was before them and will be after them."

They went out of the house together, and the silence that fell between them was like the silence at the bottom of deep waters.

THE END